

New bomb kills four, wounds 30 in Algeria

ALGIERS (R) — A bomb killed four people and wounded 30 on Friday in a town in western Algeria, government security forces said. The toll from a bomb blast at another town, Khemis Miliana, on Thursday has risen to 15 dead and 25 wounded, they added.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الرابطة

Turkish troops kill 22 Kurdish fighters in southeast

TUNCELI (R) — Turkish troops killed 22 Kurdish rebels in clashes overnight in south-eastern Turkey, officials said on Friday. The heaviest fighting was in the rugged eastern province of Tunceli, where 10 Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) rebels were killed in a sweeping offensive backed by U.S.-made Cobra and Sikorsky helicopters, military officials said. The guerrillas were killed as army troops manoeuvred to cut them off at key points in the mountains and prevent them fleeing westwards, army sources said. One soldier was wounded. Turkey's army has stepped up its drive against the rebels in recent weeks, seeking to take advantage of potential disorder within the PKK ranks after the arrest of their leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in Italy last month.

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Israel steps up pressure on Palestinians

Agencies

ISRAEL STEPPED up pressure on the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on Friday to curtail anti-Israeli violence, ignoring Palestinian officials from entering or leaving a West Bank town where two Israelis were attacked by a mob.

The Israeli army said it erected roadblocks outside Ramallah and did not allow Palestinian officials, police and security men to pass until it won a pledge from the PNA "to take strong action against rioters" who attacked the Israelis on Wednesday.

"After the commitment was made, the roadblocks were dismantled," the army said in a statement.

The brief blockade was the latest sign of mounting Israeli-Palestinian tensions ahead of a Dec. 12 to 15 visit to Israel and Palestinian-controlled areas by U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Mustapha Issa, the Palestinian governor of Ramallah, told Reuters the Israeli army had blocked off the northern entrance to the city but a side road only 10 metres away was left open.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu poured more scorn on his Palestinian peace partners in remarks broadcast on Friday, accusing them of trying to wreck the Wye River land-for-security accord.

"But Palestinians said Netanyahu's invective was aimed at appeasing his own coalition partners who oppose the deal signed at the White House on Oct. 23."

Netanyahu, who announced this week he was suspending the handover of more West Bank land to the Palestinians, said Israel could not proceed with business as usual after



A Palestinian waves his stick at two Jewish settlers threatening him with their dog as they force him to leave a land they occupied in Turmusaiya on the West Bank on Friday. Jewish settlers opened fire toward Palestinians who were protesting the occupation of their lands (AFP photo)

Wednesday's attack on the Israeli soldier and civilian in Ramallah.

"I must tell you that from the moment we returned from the Wye conference, regrettably, we have seen an ongoing attempt by the Palestinians to dissolve the agreement, to ignore the agreement or to violate it crudely," he said in an address late on Thursday.

His new conditions for ceding West Bank land have

drawn fire from both Palestinians and the United States.

The Israeli cabinet has demanded that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat halt "incitement," promise not to declare an independent state next May, and announce that Israel never agreed to free jailed Palestinians with "blood on their hands."

"This announcement by the Israeli government was inspired by internal Israeli politics and not anything that transpired," Arafat aide Ahmad Tibi told Israel's Channel Two television.

"After the patient was saved at Wye River, someone has shot him in the foot," said Tibi.

Under the U.S.-brokered peace deal, Israel last month began a gradual three-month handover of 13 per cent of the West Bank in return for Palestinian security and political measures. Netanyahu's

cabinet said the next land transfer, due shortly after Clinton's visit, was contingent on its conditions being met.

Trying to dampen strong U.S. criticism, Netanyahu told Secretary of State Madeleine Albright that he has made no new demands on the Palestinians while suspending a West Bank pullback, his senior adviser said Friday.

(Continued on page 12)

Immunisation campaign to resume in one month

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Health Minister Nael Ajlouni announced on Friday that his ministry will resume in one month the national vaccination campaign interrupted in September following over six hundred cases of students complaining of symptoms due to high susceptibility to the anti-diphtheria and tetanus serum.

The results of laboratory tests conducted on samples of the D&T vaccines by the World Health Organisation in Switzerland and released on Thursday showed that there was nothing wrong with the vaccines, the minister affirmed.

The vaccines had been donated to Jordan by UNICEF and were manufactured by a Hungarian company under Canadian licence.

A special committee set up at the outbreak of the first cases of students

falling sick, and including experts from the Health Ministry, Royal Medical Services, University of Jordan, private sector as well as the WHO, "concluded that inoculation, storage, refrigeration, and conservation procedures were all adequate."

"The committee reviewed all pediatric reports on the cases of the students who complained of symptoms, and concluded that not one single case required hospitalisation," Ajlouni said.

Both the symptoms — namely high fever, headache, dizziness and nausea — and the number of cases fell within the norm, the minister reiterated.

But panic transformed a natural and normal occurrence into some sort of "emergency," and, in the wake of media reports and countagious fears, symptoms that could have normally been treated with a painkiller were blown out

of proportion, Ajlouni said. More than 25,000 students were inoculated in the first phase of this year's immunisation campaign, which was launched on Sept. 16.

Tenth-graders, among whom most cases of high susceptibility were reported, accounted for 10,000 of the total number of students inoculated in the campaign, which was halted pending the results of the laboratory tests.

"We believe it will take two months to vaccinate the rest of the students and have already started preparations to resume the campaign," Ajlouni said.

The vaccines that were not used in the September inoculation campaign, meanwhile, have been destroyed, the minister said, since they expired at the end of November.

"But we already have the necessary amount of vaccines to continue the national campaign," he said.

Iraq asks Annan to curb UNSCOM intelligence links

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz has asked U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to curtail contacts between U.N. arms inspectors and Western intelligence agencies, Iraqi newspapers said on Friday.

"They said Aziz wrote to Annan on Thursday saying the links which the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors developed with American, British and Israeli intelligence threatened Iraq's national security and undermined U.N. credibility."

"We hope that urgent steps will be taken to stop the links between the UNSCOM and intelligence apparatuses, especially of countries with a hostile policy towards Iraq," Aziz said.

"Aziz cited press reports last month that planned U.S. air strikes against Iraq — called off at the last moment after Baghdad backed down on a decision to stop cooperating with UNSCOM — would have targeted military sites selected with help of information compiled from seven years of UNSCOM inspections in Iraq."

"This means that information about Iraq which the UNSCOM obtained under the cover of [U.N.] Security Council resolutions were handed over to the Pentagon and that the American military plans were based on them," he said in the letter, a copy of which was published in Iraqi papers.

The United States and Britain have said they remain poised for military action

against Iraq if it reneges on its pledge to resume full cooperation with UNSCOM.

Iraq has refused to hand over an Iraq Air Force document demanded by UNSCOM chairman Richard Butler. Butler is expected to report to the Security Council later this month on whether he considers Iraq is meeting its commitments.

Aziz referred to comments by former UNSCOM inspector Scott Ritter, who resigned in August, in which he said Iraq provided information to UNSCOM about Iraqi arms programmes.

Aziz also charged UNSCOM with leaking information to Western media without consulting Iraq and accused its deputy, Charles Duelfer, of meeting an Iraqi opposition leader in London last month, a charge denied by Duelfer.

"These facts... point to an essential defect in the style of UNSCOM's work. Because of the lack of a mechanism to oversee it, it has become an organisation which the U.N. Security Council has no control over," Aziz said.

"It's style [of work] threatens the credibility and honour of the United Nations," UNSCOM officials, charged with scrapping Iraq's weapons of mass destruction after the 1991 Gulf war, have repeatedly said Iraq has withheld information from them about banned biological and chemical weapons programmes and long-range missiles.

(Continued on page 12)

U.N. panel criticises Israel

GENEVA (AP) — Non-Jews in Israel are treated as second-class citizens, a U.N. rights panel said Friday, asserting the emphasis on being a Jewish state "encourages discrimination."

The panel was particularly critical of the plight of the Jahalin, a bedouin tribe it says were forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands to expand a Jewish settlement near occupied Jerusalem.

"The committee deplores the manner in which the government of Israel has housed these families in a garbage dump in Abu Dis under sub-human living conditions," the U.N. panel said.

The U.N. committee of 18 independent experts meets annually to review whether countries in the 137-nation

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have assured an adequate standard of living for their citizens.

In its review of Israel, the panel expressed "concern that the government... does not accord equal rights to its Arab citizens."

"This discriminatory attitude is apparent in the comparatively lower standard of living of the Israeli Arabs," the panel said, adding that the country's emphasis on being a Jewish state "encourages discrimination and accords a second-class status to its non-Jewish citizens."

Israeli officials said the government had made "tangible and costly progress" in combating inequality and that the campaign would continue. But they conceded

that sometimes Palestinians suffer economically because of security clamp-downs necessary to fight terrorism.

In a list of 15 recommendations and suggestions, the committee called for equal treatment of all Israeli citizens, respect for the right to self-determination and recognition of the rights of Arab bedouin villages to basic services, including water.

The committee also criticised Canada for permitting poverty and homelessness, and for the conditions in which its native population lives.

In reviewing the situation in Switzerland, Germany and Cyprus, it noted the problems facing women and the high level of domestic violence.

Turkey says international court cannot try Ocalan

ANKARA (R) — Foreign Minister Ismail Cem voiced fresh Turkish opposition on Friday to an Italian-backed proposal to try Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan in an international court, Anatolian news agency said.

The arrest of Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) leader Ocalan, Turkey's most wanted man, in Italy last month has caused a diplomatic war of words between the two NATO allies.

Italy has ruled out handing over Ocalan to Turkey on the grounds that its constitution forbids extradition of suspects to countries where the death penalty is in effect.

But in an apparent move to ease the tension, Italy and Germany suggested last week that Ocalan, now under house arrest in Rome, be

tried in an international forum.

Turkey has vociferously opposed the plan, fearing that a European court could bring into question Ankara's policies in its 14-year struggle with the PKK, fighting for self-rule in the country's southeast.

"It is out of question to try the head of the separatists in an international court," Anatolian quoted Cem as saying. The minister said Ankara was still awaiting an official response from Italy to its request for Ocalan's handover.

Turkey holds Ocalan responsible for the deaths of more than 29,000 people in the PKK's armed struggle and says he should face multiple charges of killing, extortion, arms and drugs traffick-

ing in a domestic court.

Prime Minister-designate Bulent Ecevit backed Turkish efforts to swiftly abolish capital punishment, hampered by the collapse of Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz's coalition government last week on corruption allegations.

"If we scrap the death penalty Italy may extradite him to Turkey. I hope the parties in parliament will review the issue once again," Anatolian quoted Cem as saying.

Turkey has the death penalty on its statute books, but has not carried out an execution since the early 1980s.

Earlier this week caretaker Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz urged Italy to put Ocalan on trial if it would not extradite him. Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema,

explicitly referring to Ocalan as a "terrorist," said he wanted to ensure that the detained rebel chief received a fair trial.

D'Alema, who has tried to garner support from within the European Union over the Ocalan case, insisted that attention also had to be focused on finding a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question.

The Turkish military urged the West to back Ankara's diplomatic drive against Kurdish guerrillas, describing Ocalan's calls for peace as an empty deceit.

Ocalan in Rome has said he wanted to negotiate with the Turkish government a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict. Turkey has so far rejected any negotiation with the PKK.

Hoss' cabinet smaller than Hariri's

BEIRUT (R) — Hoss's new government is much smaller than Hariri's 30-member administration and merges several portfolios.

The 68-year-old premier, appointed by President Emile Lahoud on Wednesday, said he had kept the foreign ministry portfolio.

Central Bank Vice Governor Nasser Al Saidi will be economy, trade and industry minister and economist George Kurum finance minister.

Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Michel Al Murr was the only official to keep his position in the new cabinet.

Suleiman Tony Franjeh, Hariri's health minister, was appointed to the newly-formed agriculture, housing and cooperatives ministry.

Hoss said his new government would meet on Saturday to draft the communiqué it will deliver to parliament next week. The cabinet still has to win a vote of confidence from the 128-member assembly before it takes office.

Israeli warplanes, artillery strike south Lebanon

NABATIYEH (R) — Israeli warplanes and artillery attacked suspected guerrilla targets in south Lebanon for the second day running on Friday, security sources said.

They said two planes fired a total four rockets near Habboush village, which lies east of Israel's south Lebanon occupation zone. The raid, the 106th on south Lebanon so far this year, followed shelling of the outskirts of the nearby Kufri Roummane village.

An Israeli army statement said: "Israeli fighter planes this morning attacked terrorist targets north of the eastern sector of the security zone in south Lebanon. The pilots reported accurate hits and all our planes returned safely to their bases."

There were no immediate reports of casualties in the attack, the second by the Jewish state in as many days. On Thursday, warplanes struck at suspected positions of the pro-Iranian Hizbollah guerrilla group fighting to oust Israel and its South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia from the south.

Earlier, the Lebanese

Brigades, a coalition of Islamist and nationalist guerrillas, said it had staged a series of assaults on Israeli posts inside the occupied 15 kilometres deep southern strip.

Israel, which has controlled parts of the south since 1978, set up the so-called security zone in 1985, saying it needed to protect its borders from potential guerrilla attacks.

Twenty Israeli soldiers have been killed and 91 wounded in the conflict in southern Lebanon since the start of 1998.

In Tel Aviv, meanwhile, an Israeli military official said two Israeli soldiers and a member of the SLA militia were wounded on Friday when they fired at each other in a case of mistaken identity.

"An Israeli army force was on operational duty in the security zone in south Lebanon. A shepherd thought the soldiers were terrorists and alerted members of the South Lebanon Army who were on leave," a military spokeswoman said.

Arab Bank: Strength and stability

THE RECENT ratings assigned to Arab Bank Plc by the U.S. Moody's Investors Service have proved once again the bank's ability to stand firm in the face of the economic turmoil in the emerging markets, says deputy chairman and president of the bank, Khalid Shoman.

Moody's on 20th November issued the bank highest long and short-term foreign currency deposit ratings of Baa1/Prime-2 and a Bank Financial Strength Rating (BFSR) of C+. "We have achieved these ratings despite the turmoil that has gripped the world's financial markets and which has had serious repercussions for many financial institutions," Shoman says. "Arab Bank, as Moody's notes, has a long tradition of surviving wars, nationalisations and economic crisis and has developed crisis management plans that should allow us to meet our obligations under conceivable stress scenarios."

Moody's said that the rating of Arab Bank reflects the bank's sound financials coupled with a strong and defensible franchise



in the Arab World. "The bank is among the largest in the Middle East; it commands an important position, plays a regional role and is well regarded by its peers," it added.

U.S. ratings agency Thomson BankWatch in June assigned Arab Bank Plc a short-term rating of TBW-1, and its branches in the U.S. and Europe a long-term rating of AA-. The bank was assigned the AA- rating on the basis of its long-standing management, strong capital base, excellent asset quality and frontline liquidity and its proven track record in crises and reputation as a true "flight to quality" bank.

Annan may have got assurances from Libya for trial, says diplomat

TUNIS (R) — U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan may have received assurances from Libya for a deal that would set in train the trial of two Libyan suspects in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, a senior North African diplomat said on Friday.

Annan said on Thursday he would go to Libya on Saturday for talks with Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi on the surrender of the two suspects.

"I am going to try to settle this problem once and for all," Annan told reporters after meeting Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who met Qadhafi on the Lockerbie issue in October.

"I have the impression that he has got some assurances from the Libyans," the diplomat told Reuters.

"There were one or two outstanding points, and if Annan decided to go ahead with the trip to Libya that means that he is hopeful they will be overcome," he said.

"We understand also that the

Libyans want to handover the two suspects to an international authority that is independent of the other parties," he added referring to the United States and Britain. "This has a symbolic value for the Libyans."

News of the trip brought optimism from the United States and Britain, although diplomats tempered this with caution, citing Qadhafi's unpredictability.

A senior U.S. official said on Thursday Washington hoped the meeting would result in the handover of the two suspects. But Ambassador Nancy Soderberg, speaking for the U.S. mission to the United Nations, said she did not know what the outcome of Annan's session with Qadhafi would be and how firm his assurances were from Tripoli.

"We would expect a meeting between the secretary-general and Libyan officials to produce a handover of the suspects," she said. "We expect that to be the purpose of his travel to Libya."

Annan is due to fly to Sirte, a coastal city 400 kilometres east of the Libyan capital, where Qadhafi usually entertains his guests, after the Security Council approved a waiver of the flight ban.

U.N. sources said the U.N. chief would go on Friday to the Tunisian island resort of Djerba, some 100 kilometres north of the Libyan border. He would fly to Sirte on Saturday morning and return to Djerba on the same day, they added.

Libya has agreed to put the two nationals — Abdul Basset Ali Mohammad Al Megrahi and Lamun Khalifa Fhimah — on trial in the Netherlands. But it has refused British and U.S. demands that they serve their sentence in Scotland if convicted.

Britain welcomed Annan's announcement that he would visit Libya. But it made clear that a U.S.-British plan to try the Libyan suspects before a special court of Scottish judges in the Netherlands was non-negotiable.

A former air force base in the Netherlands has been set aside for the trial.

"Naturally we welcome efforts to implement the U.N. Security Council resolution [on handing over the suspects]. We hope the secretary-general can persuade Qadhafi to reply promptly so justice can be done," said a British Foreign Office spokesman.

"Kofi Annan fully recognises that the U.S.-British plan is non-negotiable... the best we can hope for from Saturday's meeting is official notification that Qadhafi is prepared to hand over the suspects."

Western diplomats had said Annan would not go to Libya unless he had been assured Qadhafi had agreed to surrender the suspects for trial.

But in private, British officials are reluctant to express optimism about Annan's chances of success.

"It is no use trying to figure out what could happen. It is very hard to predict what Qadhafi might do," one said.



PROTEST AGAINST ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF LEBANON: Israeli Jews and Druze demonstrate Friday near the defence ministry in Tel Aviv. Peace activists demonstrated across Israel for a unilateral pullout from south Lebanon, where Israeli troops have had surmounting casualties in recent weeks. Arabic placard reads: 'Staying in Lebanon gives no security, and no guarantee. Stop the bloodshed and send back our children alive' (AFP photo)

Iran launches Gulf naval manoeuvres, woos Arab states

TEHRAN (R) — Iran's navy on Friday launched manoeuvres in the Gulf involving 50,000 sailors and marines with a message of friendship to Arab neighbours across the strategic waterway, Tehran Radio reported.

It said the main stage of the

Vahdat-77 (Unity-77) exercises started with a six-gun salute to the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with which Iran has been trying to improve ties.

Iranian media have said Omani military observers would

attend the war games, which cover an area stretching from the central Gulf to the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman and involve the regular navy and Revolutionary Guards naval units.

Up to 16 naval vessels and 120

aircraft as well as missile-launching units are taking part in the manoeuvres, part of regular Iranian war games in the Gulf, which are due to reach their peak on Sunday, the media said.

The exercises follow a United States military build-up in the

Gulf last month during a confrontation between Iraq and the United Nations over U.N. arms inspectors.

Iran opposes the presence of Western navies in the Gulf and has often called for regional defence arrangements.

Iran's ties with the Gulf Arab states have been improving.

But Tehran has had little success in persuading its conservative neighbours, which have defence pacts with Western powers, to develop military cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

Rights group see progress, setbacks on convention's 50th anniversary

AMMAN (J.T.) — In its annual world report released Thursday, Human Rights Watch praised major advancements in human rights over the last 50 years, but called for an international system of justice to anchor that progress in permanent institutions.

Human Rights Watch also criticised U.S. policy on human rights as "subject to large blind spots," and noted that "human rights concerns rarely ranked with the [Clinton] administration's other interests."

Many governments obviously still violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which will mark its 50th anniversary on Dec. 10, an HRW statement said. But the possible extradition of Chilean ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet from Britain to Spain has underscored the growing willingness of many countries to end impunity for gross abusers of human rights.

"Pinochet's arrest makes a very nice 50th anniversary present," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. "But we need an international system of justice to ensure that no despot gets away with his crimes."

The Human Rights Watch Report 1999, a 506-page book, offers a synopsis of the human rights situation in 68 countries, as well as analyses of U.S., European, and United Nations responses to those abuses. The Middle East and North Africa section includes detailed chapters on Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, the Palestinian [National] Authority,

Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Tunisia.

In 1998, the Middle East and North Africa experienced a steady erosion of freedom of expression and association, although the bleak picture was brightened by some prisoner releases and ratification by governments of international human rights treaties.

"There has been little or no improvement in most of the region regarding torture, arbitrary arrest, 'disappearances,' and executions," said Hanny Megally, executive director of the organisation's Middle East and North Africa division. Megally also cited as areas of special concern the murderous strife in Algeria, the humanitarian impact of the conflict between the U.N. Security Council and Iraq, and the inability of many Palestinian refugees to exercise basic rights.

The report criticises the Clinton administration for failing to use the U.S. role as the preeminent outside power to promote human rights in the region. "Washington gave no sign that grave and systematic abuses by close allies such as Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain would have any effect on U.S. relations with those countries," said Megally.

The report's country chapters make the following points:

• **Algeria:** Testimonies continued to highlight the responsibility of Islamist armed groups for massacres and killings of civilians. Disturbing evidence emerged, however, that suggested collusion by security forces, underscoring the need for Algeria

finally to permit independent investigations. Security forces were implicated in other serious abuses, including torture. Efforts by relatives of "disappeared" persons and others compelled the authorities to recognise publicly the extent of this problem, though they continued to deny any government role.

• **Bahrain:** The home port of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, Bahrain, intensified already severe restrictions on the right to freedom of association and freedom of expression. The government also continued to detain for extended periods without trial persons peacefully advocating political reforms, and sentenced others following patently unfair trials. Public criticism of government officials and policies remained off-limits.

• **Egypt:** Lack of accountability for serious human rights abuses prevailed as President Mubarak continued to rule under a state of emergency now in its eighteenth year. Egyptian human rights groups documented cases of torture, deaths in custody, "disappearances," and abysmal prison conditions. The government continued to restrict opportunities for independent peaceful political activity and rejected attempts to legalise new opposition political parties.

• **Iran:** The struggle between supporters and opponents of President Khatami's reformist programme highlighted and in some instances worsened human rights violations. Executions of prisoners following unfair trials proliferated. Independent

press activity increased, but so did harassment, closure orders, and vigilante attacks directed at newspapers and magazines. The trial of Tehran Mayor Karabashi exposed longstanding and serious deficiencies in the criminal justice system.

• **Iraq:** The government continued to carry out mass arrests, widespread torture, summary executions, "disappearances," and the forcible displacement of civilians. Stringent economic sanctions contributed to a massive humanitarian crisis that was alleviated only very partially by the U.N.'s "food-for-oil" programme. In Iraqi Kurdistan, fighting between the two largest Kurdish parties and offensives by Turkish military forces produced civilian deaths and displacement and aggravated the humanitarian crisis there.

• **Israel:** Many Israeli laws and practices openly discriminated against ethnic and religious minorities. In the significant parts of the West Bank and Gaza that it still controlled, Israel's closure policies amounted to collective punishment. Israel continued to practice arbitrary and extended detention without trial of security suspects. Torture during interrogation remained prevalent. Israel continued to demolish Palestinian homes illegally and to confiscate residence permits of Palestinians living in Jerusalem.

• **Palestinian National Authority:** The PNA failed to institute safeguards against serious abuses, including prolonged and arbitrary detention without charge, torture during interrogation, and grossly unfair trials. Critics

who spoke or wrote openly, and judges who protested trial abuses, faced retaliation.

• **Saudi Arabia:** An absolute monarchy, the Saudi government allowed no criticism of itself or its policies. Nor did it permit political parties or independent civic activity that might challenge the ruling. Arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, torture, and corporal and capital punishment remained the norm in both political and common criminal cases. Serious abuses were unchecked in the absence of an independent judiciary or a free press.

• **Syria:** The government released 121 Lebanese and an unconfirmed number of Syrian political prisoners, but peaceful expression and association remained criminalised, the press was tightly controlled, and there were no legal mechanisms by which peaceful opposition groups could operate openly. Political prisoners continued to be treated cruelly, and some were held beyond the expiry of their sentences.

• **Tunisia:** Open political debate and opposition activity were virtually nonexistent, as the government of President Ben Ali criminalised expression critical of the government and all forms of "unlicensed" political activities. Police surveillance and harassment of government critics, and members of their families, remained intense, and the press and the judiciary lacked independence. Torture persisted but was a taboo topic in the media.

NEWS IN BRIEF

British minister arrives today

AMMAN (J.T.) — Britain's water minister, Alan Meale, arrives in Amman today with a 14-member delegation for a four-day official visit to discuss water issues with senior Jordanian officials. Meale will meet Minister of Water and Energy Hani Mulki, Minister of Transport and Public Works Nasser Lawzi, Minister of Rural Affairs and the Environment Tawfiq Kreishan and officials from the Jordan Valley and Water authorities. Meale's delegation consists of representatives of nine top British water firms.

'63 drug-related cases in November'

AMMAN (Petra) — The Anti-Narcotics Department Thursday announced it dealt with 63 drug-related cases last month involving 98 persons of different nationalities. Colonel Nazih Shreideh, director of the department, said 11 of the people involved were suspected drug users while 51 were dealers. The department seized 49.9 kilograms of hashish, 25.1 kilograms of heroin and 1,599 drug pills, according to Shreideh, who also reported that his department seized more than 10 million counterfeit Iraqi dinars from two persons.

Thousands pray for rain

AMMAN (J.T.) — Tens of thousands of Jordanians, including Prime Minister Fayez Tarawneh, prayed for rain on Thursday at a mass prayer, but the Meteorology Department forecast clear skies for the coming five days. The prayer, in which men, women and children from all walks of life participated, took place right before Thursday afternoon prayers in Amman as well as other parts of the Kingdom. But several officials said the lack of rain was not a cause for concern yet. Officials from Ministry of Agriculture yesterday dismissed any negative impact on the seasonal crops due to the delay. "The ministry advises farmers to [prepare] for planting olive trees and wait for the rain," said the ministry's secretary general, Hashem Siboul.

Israel court delays changes to tomb

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel's Supreme Court has blocked the government from removing the words "holy" and "martyr" from the tombstone of a Jewish settler who was massacred 29 Muslim worshippers. The gunman, New York-born Baruch Goldstein, opened fire on the Palestinian worshippers in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the West Bank town of Hebron in February 1994, and was killed by survivors of the attack. Goldstein was called a hero by fellow settlers and was buried in the centre of the nearby Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba. The Israeli army, which administers parts of the West Bank, decided two months ago to delete the words of praise from the tombstone in an effort to discourage Jewish extremists from making pilgrimages to the site. The army decision invoked a new law making it illegal to erect monuments to militants.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

15:10 Animaniacs
15:30 The Adventures of the Bush Patrol
16:00 Drama - Neighbours
16:30 Peer Pressure
17:00 French programme
..... Faut Pas Rever
18:15 Family programme - Wind at My Back
19:00 New in French
19:15 French Programme
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy - Murphy Brown
20:00 Doc. - Today's Health
20:30 Drama - The Pretender
21:10 An ABC Democracy
21:20 Boston Pops Orchestra
22:00 News in English
22:30 Feature film - "Die Hard"
00:15 Twisted
01:30 End of T.X.

PRAYER TIMES

04:54 Fajr
06:16 (Sunrise) Duha
11:26 Dhuhur
14:13 Asr
16:36 Maghreb
17:58 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366

Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811

St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751

Amman International Church Tel. 5865897

German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404

The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146

The Uniate Catholic Church Tel. 4892679

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679

The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

Temperatures are expected to rise slightly and gradually today and tomorrow with clouds appearing at different altitudes. Winds will be easterly to southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, it will be fine, winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp. 08/20

Aqaba 14/24

Deserts 06/22

Jordan Valley 13/25

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 19 Aqaba 23. Humidity readings: Amman 31 per cent. Aqaba 55 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajlun 06/17

Jerash 12/24

Uzi Qays 09/23

Madaba 07/23

Petra 05/24

Dead Sea 15/29

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Walid Masri 5675485

Dr. Youssef Rashid 4875792

Dr. Ahmad Manna 5399413

Dr. Khalil Jhalil 4784450

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AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadha Pharmacy 5537004

Rula Al Dawa Pharmacy 5336169

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

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Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

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Rula Al Dawa Pharmacy 5336169

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 463

Company to grant JD25,000 annually to ministry's relief fund

AMMAN (J.T.) — FastLink, Jordan's sole mobile phone service provider, will contribute JD25,000 annually to the Ministry of Social Development to help the ministry care for the needy.

An agreement on the grant was signed Thursday by FastLink Executive Director David Bosworth and Minister of Social Development Mohammad Mamsar.

According to Mamsar, the donation will be given to families facing disasters through coordination and cooperation with voluntary groups and charitable organisations.

The ministry recently created a fund to offer immediate relief to families suffering from disasters and to help orphans, children from broken families and the elderly. Mamsar noted in a statement following the signing of the agreement.

He said the relief fund will not be augmented by the state's budget but rather depends on contributions from private companies, banks and charitable organisations.

Mamsar expressed hope that other private sector companies would donate to the needy through charitable and voluntary organisations as a regular philanthropic exercise and as a show of social solidarity.

The minister said the first disbursement of aid from the relief fund will be given to a family in the Balata neighbourhood in Amman whose home burnt down.

He said that the National Aid Fund is providing emergency aid to the family, while the relief fund will donate some furniture and help the family rebuild their home.



PRINCESS RAHMA LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN: Her Royal Highness Princess Rahma shoots the starter's gun launching an aid campaign Thursday organised by the National Orthodox School in Amman to help underprivileged families during the winter. The event is one of many marking His Majesty King Hussein's 63rd birthday (Petra photo)

Three executed for murder Nine executions in Jordan this year

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Two Egyptian sisters and a Jordanian man convicted of murdering two people in two separate incidents were hanged at dawn on Thursday, judicial sources said.

The executions raise the number of people put to death in the Kingdom this year to nine.

The three convicts made emotional pleas and asked God to forgive them for their crimes before the dawn executions at Swaga Prison, a local newspaper reported.

"I want my three children to live with my mother. I want to be buried next to my father and I do not want coroners to carry out an autopsy on my body," the Arabic daily Al Dustour quoted Egyptian Abeer Ibrahim, 24, as saying.

Abeer and her sister, Rasha Ibrahim, 19, were sentenced to death in May after the Criminal Court found them guilty of robbing and murdering Fakhrieh Isahq Kurdi, 73, in Shmeisani last year.

"I want to be buried next to my father," the daily quoted Rasha as saying before she was hanged.

The court convicted both of the July 7, 1997 theft and premeditated murder of Kurdi.

According to court documents, Abeer, who worked as a domestic helper for the late Kurdi, plotted to steal her money and jewellery.

On the morning of the incident, the sisters bought chemical mace and headed to Kurdi's house, where she lived on her own, the court papers said.

They sprayed her face with mace and dragged her body to the bedroom and pressed a wet towel against her mouth and nose until she died, the court added. They later stole her jewellery and other things and fled the house after locking the door.

They sold the jewellery but were arrested by police as they attempted to leave Jordan via the port of Aqaba.

The two women, who reportedly confessed to their crime to both the police and the criminal prosecutor, pleaded not guilty during the trial.

The body of Kurdi was discovered by her two daughters when they came to visit her hours after the crime.

A total of seven women have now been prosecuted

during the past six years, including three in 1997 for premeditated murders.

Mahmoud Mashqabeh, 24, who was also executed on Thursday, asked God to have mercy on him. Al Dustour quoted him as saying.

"I regret what I did. I want you to bury me next to my grandfather and I do not want my family to cry for or mourn my death," it said. "I also ask the family of the victim to forgive me."

In June, the Criminal Court found Mashqabeh guilty of murdering Mohammad Ahmad, 26, in Zarqa on Aug. 30, 1997.

According to court documents, the defendant claimed that he killed his next-door neighbour Ahmad because he had harassed his sisters. He stabbed Ahmad to death in his shop.

Thursday's executions were attended by the prison's director, the criminal prosecutor and representatives from the Mufti Department, the Interior Ministry, the Forensic Medicine Department, the Badia Forces and other officials.

The executions were ratified by the Court of Cassation, the Cabinet and a Royal Decree.

New anti-forgery safeguards to be introduced to passports

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The government Friday said it will incorporate safeguards next year into the new format of passports currently being introduced to meet international standards in order to minimise the possibility of counterfeiting or illegally using the documents.

Passports Department Director General Awni Yefas said that in order to help prevent manipulation or forgery, a contract was signed recently with a French firm to issue the new edition of Jordanian passports with these safeguards as soon as current passport quantities are exhausted.

"The decision came after we noticed an increase in

passport forgery cases, a problem that any country in the world could face," Yefas told the Jordan Times.

He added that the cost of the new document is almost double that of the old version but said charges to the public will remain unchanged.

Carriers of old passports that have not expired are not required to replace or renew them before their original expiration date.

Earlier this year, the department began gradually introducing the new passport format in accordance with global standards of the Canada-based International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Air Transport Association to facilities the travel of citizens worldwide.

Thousands of the newly

formatted copies were issued to meet the Kingdom's need for 1998. The size of the document and the colour of the covers — green, red, brown and blue — remain unchanged depending on whether they are ordinary, diplomatic, special or temporary passports. However, pages are now printed horizontally instead of the present vertical form and their number has been reduced to 48 from 60. The holder's full name, mother's maiden name, place and date of birth, issue and expiration dates are displayed on the front page instead of the being scattered across the first three pages as in the past. The national number, given to everyone who is included in a family book, has been moved to the front page instead of the last

page. Other information has been omitted except for the civil status page, in which the names of the holder's wives and children can be added.

The new format was made to facilitate the issuance of visas by streamlining all needed information. However, Yefas was quoted by local newspapers as saying that embassies which refuse to give visas to Jordanians should not manipulate the passports or print "refused" on them.

Yefas said the department last week decided to go ahead with new regulations, including computerising all data to ensure the security and accuracy of all official documents.

The department has around 73 offices throughout the Kingdom.

Jordanian volunteer reaches out to help disabled poor in Yemen

AMMAN (J.T.) — After spending 14 months working with the physically disabled in remote villages of Yemen for United Nations Volunteers (UNV), Mohammad Abu Lail was gripped with sadness as he read a farewell statement as his final workshop before returning to Jordan.

"I will remain grateful to this kind country and its people and I will carry in my memory and heart all the feeling of appreciation and love as long as I live," the 41-year-old volunteer told an audience of civil servants, social workers, and members of non-governmental organisations with whom he had worked closely over the year.

Mohammad was one of 3,620 mid-career professionals who took time out from their careers in 1997 to participate in UNV, a volunteer-based programme which supports grassroots development projects, provides humanitarian aid and promotes human rights and democracy, a UNDP statement said.

Established in 1970 by the United Nations, the UNV reports to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and works through UNDP country offices around the world. Nearly three-quarters of UNVs serve in the world's poorest nations such as the least developed countries or small island economies of Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, receiving a modest monthly living allowance only.

When UNV began recruiting volunteers to improve vocational rehabilitation services for the disabled in Yemen, Mohammad's colleagues urged him to apply. His profile was a perfect match — he had been a social worker for the last 15 years with the Ministry of Social Development where he developed and supervised vocational training programmes for the disabled. Over the years, Mohammad had become

well-versed in the special needs of the disabled, publishing a series of magazine articles and appearing on radio and television talk shows.

A graduate of social science and psychology from Al Najah University in Nablus, Mohammad believes his mother's untimely death during his early childhood inspired him to become a social worker and help other people.

"The most difficult part was leaving my wife and five children for an extended time," admits Mohammad, recalling the moment he was offered the assignment in Yemen. "Of course, I would not have been able to do it without my wife's support."

In Yemen, a poor, war-ravaged country with a population of approximately 17 million, a challenging task awaited Mohammad and five other volunteers from the region who were recruited by UNV. About one million Yemenis are disabled, many of them as a result of war, and there were only two rehabilitation centres in the country which catered to their needs. UNV responded by formulating a project to assist the government of Yemen in upgrading and expanding their services for the disabled.

With a \$988,000 grant from the UNDP and technical assistance from the International Labour Organisation,

Mohammad and a team of volunteers worked extensively in the field, establishing eight community-based vocational training centres throughout Yemen as well as supporting the two major centres in Sanaa and Aden. The idea was to engage the communities in the development of the centres which are owned and operated by the villagers themselves. This approach ensured that a sustainable mechanism was in place to integrate the disabled population into the community by making them productive members of society.



Mohammad Abu Lail

At these community-based centres, disabled men and women were taught a variety of skills that would help attract tourists and generate income, such as knitting, weaving, tailoring and the production of leather goods. In coastal villages, the disabled learned how to make fishing nets and take care of boats.

"Local communities have a big role to play in such programmes, because disabled people in remote areas don't have money to travel to urban centres," explains Mohammad. "There is also too much reliance on government assistance. The disabled should be encouraged to be proactive and productive."

Today, Mohammad is back working for the Ministry of Social Development at a voca-

tional rehabilitation centre for the disabled in Ruseifa. He was among 216 UNVs who served the Arab region last year. His experience in Yemen, he concedes, has strengthened his character and given him a renewed sense of commitment towards his profession.

"There are many people in the region who can benefit from the Jordanian experience in the social development of the disabled," he says. When asked if he would encourage his children to volunteer when they grow up, Mohammad responded without hesitation. "Yes, but they must be humble and have lots of patience and respect for people and their culture. After all, their aim would be to help others."

Festival's opening film fails to live up to promising beginning

By Dima Hamdan

AMMAN — "Tafelspitz," from Austria, was the first film to be shown at the 10th European Film Festival, which opened last Wednesday at the Royal Cultural Centre.

The film is a romantic comedy, based on one of the most conventional frameworks — coincidences and the irony of fate. Lilli, a woman in her twenties, is trained to become a master chef by her mother, who runs her own restaurant. Lilli decides to go to Berlin as an au pair, where she gets the chance to demonstrate her cooking skills when her host invites his American employer

(Thomas Jefferson) for dinner.

Thomas is more than impressed with Lilli's cooking, and without

REVIEW

knowing her identity, he decides to employ her and have her sent to New York. Later, Lilli and Thomas meet by coincidence one evening and they fall in love. Several incidents follow, after which not only does Lilli discover the identity of her lover, but also that his private secretary is her father who abandoned her mother while she was pregnant.

Up to that point, events go

relatively smoothly and at a reasonable pace, but then everything is wrapped up unconvincingly. All characters kiss and make up for life-time feuds, and suddenly, a wedding ceremony for the two couples takes place.

The opening of the film was promising because one was under the notion that their love for each other and their love for gastronomy would bring both characters together, which is both romantic and creative. However, that relationship was distorted and Lilli's profession became irrelevant to the development of the story. The outcome was a mere imitation of Hollywood romances, the same storyline, the same jokes,

and even most of the incidents took place in New York, where all Americans, surprisingly enough, spoke fluent German.

In addition, the development of most events was immature; we don't know why Lilli agrees to work for an unknown man to begin with, or why Jefferson falls in love with Lilli instantly for an unknown reason, or why Lilli's parents make up in minutes after decades of separation. The focus was mainly on the minor details in the story and various other cosmetics such as the use of classical music which, unfortunately, did not save the film from becoming a photocopy of previous box-office hits.

Italian piano duo in Jordan for two performances

By Jean-Claude Elias

AMMAN — The series of concerts that Amman music lovers have been accustomed to every December continues with an exceptional piano duo from Italy.

Barbara Cattabiani and Domenico Poccia will play four-hand piano pieces by Clementi, Rossini, de Falla, Grieg, Casella and Mozart at two concerts scheduled for Saturday at the Concert Hall of the Union Bank in Amman, and Monday at the Auditorium of the Faculty of Education and Fine Arts at Yarmouk University in Irbid.

Four-hand performances further enhance the already orchestral character of the piano. Cattabiani and Poccia are masters of the genre. They have played the complete repertoire of four hands and two by Mozart. In addition to numerous concerts and abroad they have recorded for Italian state television (RAI) and are working on a CD dedicated to the works of Johannes Brahms. Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel.

Cattabiani has worked with the celebrated composer Ennio Morricone — particularly known for his unforgettable film scores — and with Luca Salvatori and Beatrice Cam-

podonico. She is the artistic director of the Agnus branch of Gromafema in Rome and a member of jury of the international piano competition TIM. Poccia is a specialist of the contemporary repertoire. He has participated in the performance of the "Nozze" by Igor Stravinski and is currently teacher at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia in Rome.

A fine interpretation by the duo of Johannes Brahms' Hungarian Dances can be heard on a CD that was recorded live and that was given to the Jordan Times by the Italian embassy. Manuel de Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance" can also be heard on the

disc. The recording reveals not only highly talented performers who play together in perfect harmony, but also their exceptional sensitivity to different music style.

Among the pieces the musicians have chosen to play in Amman are the overture of Rossini's "The Barber of Seville," de Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance" and Maurice Ravel's "Spanish Rhapsody."

The concerts are held under the patronage of Hind Nasser and are presented by the Italian embassy in Amman and the National Music Conservatory of Noor Al Hussein Foundation.

Air navigation conference ends with regional plan of action

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — A five-day air navigation conference concluded Thursday by adopting a regional plan of action, an official said.

"The conference adopted common navigation and air traffic management plans which will be forwarded to the International Civil Aviation Organisation for approval," Raja'i Rifa'i, from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and chairman of the conference, told the Jordan Times.

The plan is a combination of individual plans from each country that were harmonised and adopted for the first time in the history of the region, regardless of political differences, Rifa'i added. Several task forces were created to pursue matters

related to studying the cost for utilising the European Global Navigation Satellite System and establishing a regional contingency plan for the effects of the Year 2000 bug on air navigation systems within the region.

Jordan is very active in the international arena and works through the Arab Civil Aviation Commission (ACAC) to enforce standards and contribute to finding a solution for the Millennium Bug problem, CAA Director General Jasser Ziyayad told the Jordan Times.

The conference also decided to create a special group to deal with problems related to ground operations and safety within flight information regions.

It also agreed on a draft plan for search and rescue

operations which will be signed by neighbouring countries.

"Jordan is located in the middle of the region, and therefore, most of the traffic crossing the region between Europe and Asia will benefit Jordan due to overflying fees," said Rifa'i.

Around 52 papers and different presentations were presented during the conference.

Eighty participants from 12 Arab and regional countries including Iran and Israel took part in the conference. Delegates from the Palestinian National Authority also participated for the first time. Representatives from several international organisations, the United States, Australia and the European Union also attended the conference.

What's going on

ANNUAL CHOIR
* Annual Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) choir at the Royal Cultural Centre on Monday Dec. 7 at 8:00 p.m. (daily until Dec. 10).
LECTURE
* "Learning Law in Germany" (in Arabic) by Dr. Omayya Olwan at the Applied Science University on Sunday Dec. 6. (Time of lecture to be

checked at the university).

EXHIBITIONS

* Photography exhibition "Empreintes" (a photography trip from Morocco to Turkey) at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 17.
* Works of 17 British artists and painters from the Nineteenth Century at the British Council, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 10.

* Oil paintings by Ali Najjar at Instituto Cervantes, Jabal Amman, until Dec. 14.

* The Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Contemporary Arab Artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh (Tel. 4643251/2, until Jan. 28).

* Photography exhibition entitled "Windows and Doors" by Hani Hourani at Baladna Art Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5537598), until Dec. 18.

U.K., France hail defence ties

SAINT-MALO, France (R) — Britain and France worked to finalise a landmark declaration on European defence Friday while a British domestic row over European tax harmonisation bubbled in the background.

The declaration was set to round off a two-day Franco-British summit dominated by discussions over defence. One British diplomat described the talks as "quite hard going."

Defence ministers George Robertson and Alain Richard, meeting before dawn on the deck of a British warship during an annual summit, signed a separate letter of intent formalising and extending defence ties.

"Standing here on HMS Birmingham we start a new era of British-French military relations," Robertson declared, flanked by a guard of honour of sailors from the two navies.

The document commits both sides to cooperate more closely in a number of areas to improve the way they respond to crises, allowing them to undertake joint military deployments.

Robertson pointed to the leading role of Paris and London in putting together an extraction force based in Macedonia to help protect peace monitors in Kosovo as an example of what the two governments intended.

Thursday Prime Minister

Tony Blair and President Jacques Chirac spent 45 minutes trying to narrow differences over how to give Europe a stronger defence role — a longstanding French aim which Britain has recently swung round to supporting.

"When the Americans do not want to get involved, the European countries should have a capability of acting decisively," Robertson told reporters.

Richard echoed Britain's insistence that NATO's role should be unaffected but said Europe should become "a significant and balancing power in foreign relations."

Diplomats said the thorniest issue still to be decided was the role of European institutions in creating the elusive defence identity.

France wants the European Union to take over the semi-moribund Western European Union, incorporating it as its defence pillar.

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook did his best to calm raw nerves at home over a joint push by France and Germany towards greater tax harmonisation in Europe, telling BBC radio the status quo was not going to change.

Cook dismissed British press reports on the issue as "scare stories" and stood by an earlier statement that he believed the high tide of political integration in Europe had passed.

Blair's spokesman has

complained that "hysterical" coverage of the tax issue in Britain's mostly right-wing Eurosceptic press has made a rational debate impossible.

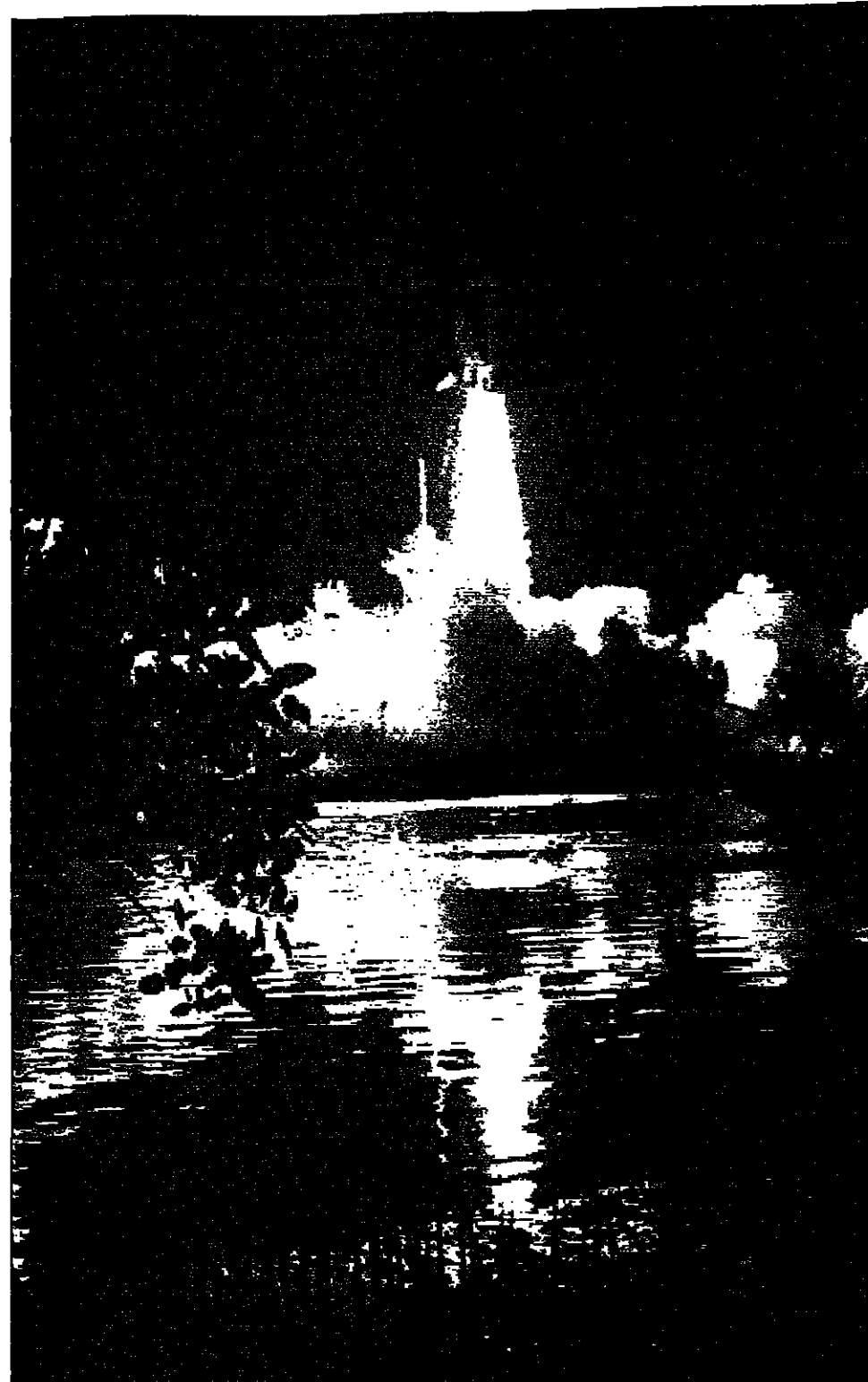
The right-wing Daily Telegraph slammed Blair's policies on Europe Friday: "Mr. Blair must defend the rights of this nation, even if it means giving up his former illusions of acceptance in Europe. He will soon learn that the pursuit of influence in the EU is a chimera," it said in an editorial.

Cook insisted that many other EU states would resist French and German proposals to end the rule that tax matters should be decided by unanimity.

"We will not agree to the harmonisation of direct taxes in Britain," he said. British income and corporation taxes tend to be lower than in most other EU states and VAT (value-added tax) rates are different.

French Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn and British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown were also meeting Friday and were expected to focus on current proposals for a common withholding tax in the EU on savings.

Britain and Luxembourg are blocking the plan. The two governments said Friday they intended to cooperate more closely in Africa, a traditional area of rivalry.



The space shuttle Endeavour reflects off the water as it lifts off from launch pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Centre. The crew was successful in their second attempt to begin Mission STS-88, the first U.S. flight for assembly of the International Space Station carrying the 'Unity' module. The Dec. 3 launch was scrubbed due to mechanical difficulties (Reuters photo)

Endeavour launched for meeting with Russian module

CAPE CANAVERAL (R) — The space shuttle Endeavour blasted off from the Kennedy Space Centre in a spectacular predawn display Friday to begin orbital construction of the \$60 billion International Space Station.

The overnight launch, following a flawless countdown, briefly spread the hues of a false dawn over much of central Florida, drawing gasps and cheers from onlookers.

The six-astronaut crew plans to join U.S. module carried by Endeavour to a Russian module 210 nautical miles in space.

"We're ready to start on a new era of international cooperation in space and get this space station built," said Endeavour commander Robert Cabana moments before the final launch sequence.

Endeavour was launched at 0835 GMT — a 10-minute window necessitated by the flight path of the Russian module Zarya, or Daybreak, which was passing over Cape Canaveral at launch time.

The shuttle will work until Sunday to adjust its orbit and rendezvous with Zarya. Astronauts will mate it to the U.S.-built Unity module in the first interlocking of space station segments in orbit.

Once a third component — the trouble-plagued Russian command module with living quarters for astronauts — is added, the station will become functional.

NASA gave the go-ahead for launch Friday after a team of

experts determined a cockpit alarm that led to a last-second launch abort Thursday was no threat to the mission, a NASA spokesman said.

"Great show, Endeavour, and welcome to orbit," fellow astronaut Scott Horowitz told the crew from Mission Control in Houston shortly after the shuttle reached orbit and its three main engines shut down.

Commander Cabana and his crew waited a year for this mission, delayed as the cash-strapped Russian space programme struggled to complete a command module scheduled for launch next summer.

The station, with a life expectancy of 10-15 years, will take more than five years to build and is the most expensive scientific undertaking ever. More than 40 shuttle flights and hundreds of hours of high-risk space walks will be required.

Supporters and detractors alike agree the station will severely test the spirit of cooperation between its senior partners, the United States and the Russians. Once bitter cold war rivals, they now lead the effort among 16 nations to build the station.

But Russia's participation is clouded by financial and political crises at home.

"There's no question the Russians are unstable partners," said Dan Hedin, chief of staff for NASA's Space Development Office. "We could go forward without them, but there would be delays. We're

very dependent on their participation in the early years of station development."

Since the United States abandoned its Apollo moon programme two decades ago, only the Russians have had the heavy boosters needed to launch the station's most massive elements.

But the threadbare Russian Space Agency has not only become dependent on U.S. cash, Moscow continues to look for ways to siphon money to its ageing Mir space station, the one-time jewel of the independent Russian programme.

U.S. shuttle launch Friday, had nothing but praise for the station and its prospects.

"I do believe in the space programme and I want to do everything I can to help," she told NASA administrator Dan Goldin and the Kennedy launch team. She praised the efforts of so many countries "working together on the kind of issue the 21st century is going to be all about."

Astronauts Jerry Ross and James Newman are slated to make three space walks to connect Zarya's power supply to unity and to complete connections so that the two modules can be pressurised.

Upon completion, the space station will stretch 110 metres and have more pressurised living and working space than a Boeing 747 jumbo jet. The station will become one of the brightest objects in the night sky.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Bosnian Serb genocide suspect in court Monday

THE HAGUE (R) — A Bosnian Serb general accused of genocide for his alleged role in one of the bloodiest incidents in the 1992-1995 Bosnian war will appear before the International Criminal Tribunal Monday, the court said. "Radislav Krstic will appear Monday. The purpose of this hearing is to ask the accused to enter a plea of guilty or not guilty on each of the counts in the indictment against him," the U.N. court said in a statement. Krstic, a high-ranking officer in the Srpska, or Bosnian Serb army, and an ally of former Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic, was arrested by NATO troops in Bosnia Wednesday. He was transferred to the court's detention cells in Scheveningen near the Hague Thursday. Krstic, by far the most prominent Bosnian Serb war crimes indictee captured to date, stands accused of genocide, persecution and murder of Muslims from the former eastern Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica. Prosecutors say he helped engineer the fall of Srebrenica, a U.N. safe area protected by Dutch U.N. troops towards the end of the war. A detailed 13-page indictment alleges Krstic was a key figure in the massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslims in and around Srebrenica. The document says he stood shoulder to shoulder with then-Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladic. Krstic's detention by NATO forces has raised the ire of Bosnian Serbs and Friday prompted Russia to question the legitimacy of the court's sealed, or secret, indictments. "The legitimacy of references to so-called 'secret' lists of indictees gives rise to the most serious doubts," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement. The tribunal switched to a system of secret indictments in 1997 to avoid alerting suspects. The court was not immediately available to comment on the Russian criticism.

S. Africa's Mbeki says committed to constitution

JOHANNESBURG (R) — South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki said Friday he was committed to the country's constitution and rejected suggestions he would depart from policies of reconciliation, nation building and peace. "The deputy president will continue to observe the letter and spirit of the provisions of the constitution and views his allegiance to the country and the constitution as supreme," Mbeki's office said in a statement. Mbeki is expected to take over as president when Nelson Mandela steps down at South Africa's second all-race elections due between May and July next year, elections which Mbeki's African National Congress should win easily. Mandela said last week the ANC wanted to win a two-thirds majority next year to stop traditionally white parties blocking the ANC's progress in improving the lives of the black majority, impoverished under decades of apartheid. A two-thirds majority would allow the party to change the constitution, but the party has said it has no reason to alter the new democracy's founding document it helped author. Commentators expect Mbeki's presidency to focus more on redistribution of resources to millions of poor blacks and less on the reconciliation and nation building that was the focus of the Mandela era, a theory his office rebutted. "The further suggestion that the deputy president will depart from the mandate of peace, reconciliation and nation building is as factless as it is without foundation," the statement said. "These policies form the cornerstone of the country's founding document — the national constitution — and do not depend on the whimsies of individuals or political parties," Mbeki's office said. Mbeki's office said anyone who suggested otherwise did not support these notions and preferred to uphold the old apartheid status quo. "The deputy president will not allow himself to be distracted from the policies of the government and the need to bring about fundamental socio-economic transformation of our society with a view to the creation of a better life for all," his office said.

Four civilians, 10 police hurt in N. Irish clashes

BELFAST (R) — Protestant demonstrators hurled fireworks, bricks and bottles at police in Northern Ireland overnight and four civilians and 10 officers were injured, police said Friday. The violence broke out after 1,000 people gathered at Drumcree by Portadown, scene of violent clashes in July after the Protestant Orange Order was barred from staging an annual parade through a Catholic part of town. No one was seriously hurt in the clashes, but the civilians were treated injuries which included a cut on the head and the officers were hit by missiles, police said. Violent clashes have broken out at Drumcree in recent years as security forces tried to enforce a ban on Orangemen parading past Drumcree Church and down the Catholic Garvaghy Road. "The protesters attacked cars and there was an incident where they tried to hijack a lorry. They attacked police lines and clubs were found in the crowd," a police spokesman said. Police fired one plastic riot bullet into the crowd but there were no reports of arrests. Local media said the crowd had gathered in support of a small permanent protest that has remind at Drumcree since July with the aim of completing the traditional parade route. The latest Drumcree disturbances came as efforts by British and Irish leaders to breathe new life into the Northern Ireland peace process hit new obstacles. British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern expressed their frustration as the talks in Belfast ran into further trouble Thursday.

Three die after blast at Russia military warehouse

YEKATERINBURG, Russia (R) — Three people died Friday in an explosion and fire at a military warehouse containing packages of artillery gunpowder in Russia's Ural city of Yekaterinburg, officials said. "At the present time, we have managed to localise the fire and are trying to establish what exactly happened," a local spokesman for the emergency ministry told Reuters. The dead were all civilians. Russian news agencies said the death toll had risen to four, but this could not be immediately confirmed. Accidents at military sites are fairly common in Russia, where cash shortages hamper security arrangements.

OSCE slams Kazakhstan over election flaws

ALMATY (R) — The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Friday urged the government of Kazakhstan to postpone a presidential election set for Jan. 10, saying its reputation abroad was at stake.

The group warned in a statement that it would not fully recognise results from the poll, which President Nursultan Nazarbayev agreed to bring forward in October from 2000. His leading opponent has been banned from taking part.

"The government of Kazakhstan should postpone the election to allow for adequate preparations to ensure a democratic election," said the OSCE, which groups European and former Soviet states in Central Asia with the United States and Canada.

"This is a strong statement and was intended to be so," Rainer Hermann, OSCE election project coordinator in Central Asia, told Reuters by telephone from neighbouring Uzbekistan.

Nazarbayev, who has led the country since Soviet times, has come under growing international pressure over his government's handling of the election since he agreed to bring it forward.

Opposition candidates say that the snap early elections has given them little time to mount a serious challenge to

Nazarbayev. But the campaign is in full swing and government officials Friday played down the possibility of postponement.

Nazarbayev is virtually assured of victory, particularly after his most serious rival, his former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin, was banned from taking part by the electoral commission for an administrative irregularity.

"Of particular concern is the refusal to register two candidates because of minor administrative convictions, raising serious doubts whether a fairly contested election is possible," the OSCE said in its statement, referring to the ban on Kazhegeldin and another candidate, Asylbek Amantay.

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) sent a mission to the resource-rich Central Asian state of 16 million last month to assess the situation.

"Under the present circumstances the ODIHR is not prepared to launch a full election observation mission," it said.

Hermann, who was on the mission, said OSCE officials had met government representatives, non-governmental groups and the media, adding that the overwhelming impression was that people were being intimidated into sup-

porting Nazarbayev. "There were so many examples, a pattern emerged. The impression was obvious all over the country."

The United States attacked the ruling last month by Kazakhstan's Supreme Court which upheld the electoral commission's decision. Nazarbayev, in what critics said was a smoke-screen for the international community, had written to the court urging it to allow Kazhegeldin to stand.

Nazarbayev is sensitive to his country's image abroad. Foreign companies have poured billions of dollars into the oil, gas and metal sectors, and their investments will be crucial to Kazakhstan's long-term economic development.

His staff defended the election process Friday.

"There is a normal process going on here resulting from the decision by parliament (to bring the vote forward)," Asylbek Bisenbayev, Nazarbayev's press secretary, told Reuters.

"There is a constitution and laws in Kazakhstan, and several candidates representing different movements, from communist to liberals, have been registered."

Three other candidates have been registered, but early Kazakh opinion polls suggest they have little support.

Zambia puts last touches to Congo summit

JOHANNESBURG (R) — Zambian President Frederick Chiluba is putting final touches to a summit of heads of state which officials say will hammer out a peace deal in the war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Government officials in the Zambian capital, Lusaka, told Reuters Friday that Chiluba, who heads a regional peace think-tank on the Congo crisis, was following up an agreement reached at a Franco-African summit in Paris last week to sign a ceasefire pact by mid-December.

"He (Chiluba) is merely

putting finishing touches to the summit's programme. Everything being equal. We should host the talks in Lusaka in the next week," an official told Reuters by telephone from the Zambian capital.

Officials at the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC), in neighbouring Botswana, which is helping to set up the summit, said Chiluba was conducting telephone consultations with all SADC heads of state, the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

"The idea is for the sum-

mit to be able to sign a binding peace deal and not involve presidents in another round of wrangles," the SADC official said.

Zambian government officials could not give dates for the Lusaka summit to bring together regional leaders, U.N. and OAU officials as well as Rwandan, Ugandan and Libyan heads of state.

But OAU officials said the Lusaka meeting would have to be held by mid-December, ahead of an OAU special summit on the former Zaire in Burkina Faso.

Diplomats said Chiluba's main problem remained nar-

rowing the gap between those calling for the rebels' participation at the talks and those against.

Previous attempts at a ceasefire under the auspices of SADC have failed because of the exclusion of rebel forces from earlier talks.

Congolese President Laurent Kabila, who refuses to recognise the rebels, accuses his former allies Uganda and Rwanda of fomenting the revolt and invading in support of those who took up arms against him on Aug. 2.

The conflict has sucked in troops from seven nations

and threatens to erupt into a full-scale multi-national war at the heart of Africa.

Zimbabwe, Angola, Chad and Namibia all sent troops to help Kabila against the rebels, who are backed by Rwanda and Uganda. Sources say Libya and Sudan are also helping Kabila.

The rebels failed in a bid to take Kinshasa in August but they control about 48 per cent of Africa's third largest country including the entire eastern region of the Congo.

Diplomats said the Lusaka meeting was expected to produce a ceasefire document to be ratified at the

Burkina Faso summit.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and French President Jacques Chirac said in Paris last Saturday that leaders of nations involved in the conflict had promised to stop fighting.

Congo rebel leader Wamba dia Wamba said Sunday the rebels would fight on but did not dismiss a ceasefire deal out of hand.

Rwanda and Uganda have thousands of troops in the Congo because of what they say are genuine security concerns. The two countries want the Lusaka summit to specifically address these concerns.

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Women m
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lung cancer

LONDON (R) — Women are more likely than men to develop the most deadly form of lung cancer, which is nearly always caused by smoking, researchers have said.

The results of Britain's largest study of lung cancer patients, presented at the British Thoracic Society winter meeting, showed that women under 65 were at particular risk of getting small cell lung cancer, which is usually inoperable.

"Our research suggests that women have less resistance to the most dangerous kind of lung cancer," Mike Pearson, the leader of the research team, said in a statement.

The scientists do not know why women are more at risk than men, but they think there are three possible explanations.

This may be due to changing patterns of smoking behaviour — some women took up the habit a decade after men started heavily, during World War II.

Women may also smoke in a different way to men, for example taking shorter, sharper inhalations, which could have an effect on the kind they develop," he added.

Another possible explanation is that women may

Dissidents, a litmus test on China's tolerance

BEIJING (R) — The fate of three leading Chinese dissidents detained this week is a litmus test on Beijing's willingness to live up to its pledge to improve human rights, diplomats and pro-democracy activists said Friday.

"That'll be the thing to watch, what kind of sentences these people draw, assuming they're charged," said one diplomat.

Since late last year, beginning with the release from prison of celebrated pro-democracy activist Wei Jingsheng, China's largely dormant dissident movement has experienced a flurry of activity amid signs Beijing may taking a softer line.

Activists were further emboldened by U.S. President Bill Clinton's China visit in late June and early July which saw Chinese authorities release dissident Wang Youcai after a brief period of detention.

But after months of playing cat-and-mouse with dissidents trying to form an opposition party, Beijing appeared to have taken its gloves off with the round-up of key members of the Chinese Democratic Party — Xu Wenli, Qin Yongmin and Wang Youcai.

In a departure from the recent trend of short detentions and a lecture from the police, Qin and Wang have been formally arrested on charges of inciting to overthrow the state and could face up to life in prison.

Xu was in police custody on suspicion of harming national security, a foreign ministry spokesman has said.

"I think the central government is prepared to move against the Chinese Democratic Party as a whole...if the international community doesn't pipe up on this," said Peng Ming, a vocal pro-reform activist.

But several Western diplomats said they have not seen signs of a general crackdown on the party so far.

Nevertheless, the diplomats said the round-up was apparently targeting members of the Chinese Democratic Party seen as instrumental in the coordi-

nation of the loose patchwork of party cells.

"This is clearly a sign of Beijing's exasperation," said one Beijing-based human rights analyst.

"They may take two or three of them and give them long sentences and hope that will scare everyone else into behaving themselves," the analyst said.

A member of the Chinese Democratic Party's branch in Shandong province agreed, quoting a Chinese proverb as saying the authorities may be "killing the chicken to frighten the monkey."

"But who are they going to scare? Our activities are protected by the law. We have done nothing illegal," he said.

Also at stake in the case is the credibility of China's much-trumpeted legal reforms and its recent pledge to participate in a United Nations treaty enshrining political freedoms.

"To have signed these international covenants and then to so blatantly box someone up for exercising those rights will give ammunition to those who are thumping the table over China's rights situation," said another Western diplomat.

The detentions risked embarrassing President Clinton, who staked his own credibility on engaging China on its human rights record as opposed to angrily scolding Beijing.

The second diplomat said China would have to weight the risk of replacing Wei Jingsheng with new martyrs, and the Communist Party's perennial interest in securing its survival.

"I don't think they care too much about what everyone else thinks. When it comes to the crunch, they're more worried about domestic security and bear the consequences," he said.

"If at the end of the day they only get short sentences or charges get dropped, then I think the democracy movement will just carry on, because they seem to have really got a head of steam up since last year."

Women more at risk from deadliest lung cancer type

LONDON (R) — Women are more likely than men to develop the most deadly form of lung cancer, which is nearly always caused by smoking, researchers have said.

The results of Britain's largest study of lung cancer patients, presented at the British Thoracic Society winter meeting, showed that women under 65 were at particular risk of getting small cell lung cancer, which is usually inoperable.

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The scientists do not know why women are more at risk than men, but they think there are three possible explanations.

"This may be due to changing patterns of smoking behaviour — many women took up the habit a decade after men smoked heavily during World War II."

Women may also smoke in a different way to men, for example taking shorter, sharper inhalations which could have an effect on the kind and severity of cancer that they develop," he added.

Another possible explanation is that women may

have some hormonal or genetic predisposition to the most deadly form of lung cancer.

The study, which was based at the Royal College of Physicians Research Unit, examined data from 46 hospitals. The researchers will use the information to check areas of the country which have poor survival rates for lung cancer.

Pearson said that despite the publicity about the dangers of smoking, teenage girls are still taking up the habit.

"Wrongly, smoking in teenage girls is on the increase. It is vitally important that young women know the greater risks they are running by smoking. We must prevent them becoming the lung cancer victims of the future," he added.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in most countries. Pearson said small cell lung cancer is particularly virulent and half of patients die in six months.

But studies have shown that quitting does reduce the risk of being killed by tobacco. Even middle aged adults who stop smoking avoid most of their risk of dying from tobacco-related diseases. If they stop earlier they avoid nearly all of it.



Parts of an anti-aircraft missile are seen near residential areas in the western port city of Incheon, South Korea. South Korean forces near the heavily militarised border accidentally launched a fully armed anti-aircraft missile (Reuters photo)

U.S. Pacific commander says N. Korea like scorpion

HONG KONG (R) — Admiral Joseph Prueher, the top U.S. commander in the Asia-Pacific region, said Friday that Communist North Korea was like a scorpion which, if cornered, could make itself painfully felt.

North Korea military forces had declined in recent years but still maintained a significant capability to inflict heavy damage on the South Korean capital of Seoul, near the border, he said.

"In my mind, I think it's like stepping on a scorpion. The scorpion will sting you as it dies, but it will still sting," he told a luncheon audience.

"If we should blunder and back North Korea into a corner where they felt like the only option they had was to lash out...there would be hundreds of thousands of casualties in the Seoul area," he said.

"We don't want that to happen. But there is no way that North Korea would prevail in a conflict," he added.

North Korea said Thursday that morale was high among its 1.2-million-strong army and they were bracing for a fight against the United States.

Prueher said there were some deluded members of North Korea's forces, who thought they

could win a war on the divided peninsula but there was "no way."

U.S. strategy was to try to bring about change with North Korea without a conflict but it was very difficult, he said.

"The most graceful word I can use for North Korean decision making is mercurial and it's worse than that," he said. "We do not understand how North Korea makes decisions. They spend about 30 per cent of their GDP on their military. It's beguiling their nation."

Prueher's command stretches from the U.S. West Coast through the Pacific and Indian oceans to the eastern coast of Africa, putting him in charge of the largest American unified command.

The most fragile spot in the area was Indonesia, where there was simultaneous fraying of the military, the economy and the political scene.

"It's a very difficult situation...exacerbated in Indonesia with the islands," the number of cultures. It's a very tough job to do under the best of circumstances," he said.

"Where the economics, the political part and the military part are the most frayed is in Indonesia," he said. "So I think

that's one where we need to be watching."

Prueher said good U.S.-China relations were crucial to the region, and noted efforts to build contacts between the American military and the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

When Beijing staged menacing war games and missile tests near rival Taiwan in March 1996 "we had zero relationship with the PLA, no communications, dangerous situation to be in," he said.

Washington responded to the war games by sending two aircraft carrier groups to the region, its biggest fleet of warships in Asia since the Vietnam war.

Prueher said since that crisis the U.S. military had tried to open a dialogue with the PLA, "building foundations for useful relations with China for the long haul."

There was a programme with the PLA in 1998 and again in 1999 but this did not include combined military exercises.

"There is a lot of ignorance in the United States about the difficulties of governance in China. Tough place to govern, 1.3 billion people. Food, clothing, shelter, jobs, energy for that many people is a tough job," he said. "It's something our nation needs to understand."

S. Korea says missile launch was accident

SEOUL (R) — South Korean forces near the heavily militarised border accidentally launched a fully armed anti-aircraft missile Friday that exploded in mid-air, injuring at least three.

Defence ministry officials said the missile was fired in the morning during an equipment-checking drill at an air force base in the western port city of Incheon, some 40 km from the border dividing the two Koreas.

The Korean air force later said in a statement that a circuitry defect occurred as soldiers turned on a switch which signified that all was ready for inspection.

"Normally the missile cannot be launched with this switch," the statement said. "A circuitry problem, not human error, was the cause of the accident," it added.

The statement said military authorities would continue to investigate the reason behind the circuitry defect.

Air force Lt. Col. Lee Sung-Ryol told reporters earlier that an automatic safety device caused the missile to self-destruct in mid-air three seconds after it was launched because a target was not assigned to it.

The missile was fully armed, he said. Reports had said in the morning that the missile was unarmed.

Fragments from the exploding missile hit a

nearby residential area, injuring at least three civilians and damaging cars and homes, Yonhap Television News (YTN) said. The flaming debris also set off a fire on a nearby hill.

One man was hospitalised after sustaining head injuries from the missile's fragments. "I felt as if I was bashed with a dull and heavy instrument. I thought I was going to die," he told YTN.

Another witness said: "It was a mess. Dust and black smoke (was everywhere)."

Local television showed images of damaged cars and broken home windows from the missile fragments. Police said 41 cars and nine homes and businesses were reported damaged by the explosion.

Some 165 square metres of trees and brush were burnt down by flames on the hill, police said.

The missile was identified as a 34-year-old "Nike Hercules" with a target range of some 160 km, designed for shooting down enemy aircraft and large missiles, YTN said.

North and South Korea have been technically at war for the past 45 years after their 1950-53 conflict ended in a now fraying truce instead of a peace treaty.

The accident near the last cold war frontier came as North Korea was escalating its war of words with the United States.

A North Korean foreign

ministry spokesman, in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency, Friday called the Korean peninsula "the worst hot spot in the world."

The presence of U.S. troops in Asia was an indicator of American designs for military domination and North Korea would fight back "mercilessly" if necessary, he said.

The comments came in the wake of remarks Thursday by North Korea's Vice Defence Minister Jong Chang-Yol, who said its army threatened to "blow up" the United States in the event of a war and that its forces were bracing for a fight against it.

Jong also accused U.S. President Bill Clinton of telling the 37,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea to prepare for war.

Tensions have grown since North Korea's Aug. 31 missile test over Japan and its refusal to grant access to what Washington suspects is an underground nuclear site near Yongbyon, where a Soviet-era nuclear power plant has been mothballed under a 1994 agreement between North Korea and the United States.

Wednesday, a North Korean military spokesman accused Washington of taking a "no compromise" stance over Pyongyang's suspected nuclear site and said the United States was pushing the situation to the "brink of war."

Suharto may be under house arrest during probe

JAKARTA (R) — Disgraced former Indonesian President Suharto could be placed under house arrest during an official probe into his wealth, a senior government official said Friday.

State Secretary Akbar Tandjung told reporters Attorney-General Andi Ghalib could put the 77-year-old former general under house arrest while he investigate allegations Suharto had corruptly amassed a personal fortune during his 32 years in power.

"If he feels this step is necessary...that there is a need to put Suharto under house arrest, it is up to the attorney-general," Tandjung said.

Ghalib later told reporters he would call Suharto in for questioning soon. "We will summon Suharto as soon as possible — God willing, next week," he said.

Ghalib said he would also summon several cabinet ministers who, he said, may be able to provide information on Suharto's actions

during his years in power.

He gave no further details. Several ministers are close to Suharto and owe their positions to him, including President B.J. Habibie.

Some analysts estimate Suharto and his family build up a fortune worth \$40 billion during his autocratic rule.

Suharto denies any wrongdoing and recently told former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, a close friend, that he was prepared to face any inquiry.

Suharto ceded control of seven charities, worth \$500 million, to the government last week and authorities said last month they had so far uncovered about \$2.6 million in accounts held by Suharto in local banks.

The forestry department says its investigations have so far found that Suharto, his family and friends own or control about nine million hectares of rainforest — about the size of the main island of Java.

Suharto stepped down in

May amid calls for democratic reforms and growing unrest triggered by the country's worst economic crisis in decades.

Habibie, his hand-picked successor.

Thursday ordered Ghalib to speed up his probe in the face of mounting protests demanding Suharto be tried over allegations of corruption and human rights abuses.

The capital was quiet Friday, the Muslim prayer day, although several hundred students were gathering at different points in the city, preparing to march towards Suharto's home.

Daily attempts to march on the home in the elite inner suburb of Menteng have been halted by heavily armed troops about one kilometre from the house.

About 200 women from a Muslim women's group also demonstrated in central Jakarta's main thoroughfare demanding an end to violent civil unrest that has rocked the world's fourth-most populated nation for much of this year.

Taiwan candidates make final election appeals

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan's election campaigns hit an exuberant crescendo on the last day of campaigning Friday as candidates islandwide used everything from firecrackers and drums to mass rallies and motorcades to woo votes.

Nowhere was the begging and pleading noisier than in Taipei, where opinion polls showed a dead heat in Chen Shui-Bian's bruising battle to keep City Hall for the opposition Democratic Progressive Party and away from Nationalist Ma Ying-Jeou.

Chen and Ma were on the stump at dawn, planning to attend at least three mass rallies each in a final push before the election Saturday, when politicking is banned.

Many of the more than 400 candidates vying for seats in a newly expanded 225-seat Legislative Yuan, or parliament, plied Taiwan's cities and villages in ear-splitting

soundtracks.

Ignoring a chilly drizzle, candidates and supporters paraded through Taipei's crowded streets in makeshift caravans of open jeeps, delivery trucks and motorbikes, beating gongs and drums, shooting off firecrackers and haranguing voters for support.

In sharp contrast to the March 1996 presidential election, when China rattled Taiwan with war games and missile tests, the island's five decades of defiance of the communist mainland has had little resonance this election season.

And though the next parliament will carry Taiwan into a new century, most races were marked by a conspicuous lack of concrete issues despite local worries over Asia's recession, nuclear power, crime, pollution, education, the ageing and traffic.

Parliament oversees a

\$41 billion state budget and makes all laws except the constitution. The elected president selects the cabinet, but parliament has power to dismiss it.

The deafening din of the high-profile mayoral contests left parliamentary candidates scrambling to get their names known.

Across Taiwan, minivans festooned with candidates' names and pictures screamed a universal theme from their loudspeakers: "Remember my name. Remember my number. Please support me. Thanks for your vote! Please. Please! Thank you, thank you!"

Some voters voiced frustration over a lack of knowledge about most candidates and where they stand.

"Election trucks or flags don't tell you anything about the candidate," said Cornelia Liap, a Taipei businesswoman.

"They just say. Please!

Please! Vote for such and such a number. That tells you nothing about their viewpoint. Such voting is a very blind act," Liao said.

The Democratic Progressive Party, determined to expand its 28 per cent presence in parliament to 35 per cent, took out newspaper advertisements advising supporters how to vote so as to spread their support across as many candidates as possible.

The party's clear worry was that incumbents would receive many votes and little known candidates would come up short under Taiwan's complicated system for proportional representation.

Some voters said the parliamentary race was being overlooked because of the Taipei mayor's race.

"While the parliamentary election is really important it seems to have been ignored," said businessman C.Y. Hsieh.

China court hears Internet dissident trial

SHANGHAI (R) — A Shanghai court Friday began hearing the case of a man accused of using the Internet to undermine the state, and authorities appeared to be detaining his wife.

Lin Hai, a 30-year-old computer engineer, was brought before the Shanghai Number One Intermediate Court for inciting subversion of state power, a court employee said.

"This hearing is being held behind closed doors," said a court employee, speaking to reporters outside the court building.

"I don't know if it is over yet," she said about one hour after the scheduled start of the hearing as uniformed and plainclothes police patrolled near the courthouse gate.

Lin's wife Xu Hong was not invited to attend the hearing but had told foreign reporters she would wait outside during the proceedings. She briefly answered a reporter's telephone call but was audibly told to hang up.

Later attempts produced a recorded message saying her phone not in service. Lin, who was arrested

earlier this year, has been accused of using the Internet to send tens of thousands of e-mail addresses to VIP Reference, a dissident publication based in the United States.

It was unclear if any decision was reached at the hearing although Chinese court decisions are usually swift. If he is convicted, Lin could face anywhere from less than three years to life in prison.

VIP Reference, one of many dissident publications that have sprung up using the Internet, says it sends information to 250,000 e-mail accounts in China from various e-mail addresses in the United States.

Court documents called VIP Reference a hostile foreign organization. The group used its data "to disseminate large numbers of articles aimed at inciting subversion of state power and the socialist system," the documents said.

The case, believed to be the first involving dissent and the Internet, was to have been heard in a closed-door session at the same court last month but was postponed at the last minute.

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Seminar highlights WTO benefits for Jordan

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), in cooperation with the USAID-funded AMIR programme, has launched the first of a series of seminars dealing with Jordan's move towards membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). More than 60 persons from government ministries and departments attended the first seminar which was held last week at Amman's Inter-Continental Hotel.

The process and benefits of accession to membership in WTO, along with requirements for membership, were featured in four hours of presentation and discussion. Participants included, in addition to MTI, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Transport, Royal Jordanian Airlines, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Telecommunications, the Central Bank, Customs Department, General Supplies Department, Investment Promotion Corporation, Ministry of Culture, Audit Bureau, Amman

Financial Market, Institute of Diplomacy, the Parliament and others. Tamam Al Ghoul, head of MTI's WTO unit, and Farhat Farhat, policy component leader in AMIR, conducted the seminar. Both emphasised economic benefits of membership in WTO, including more access to international markets for Jordanian commodities and services, and increased trade and investment. A country that meets WTO membership requirements offers a stable and globally accepted business environment, which encourages increased trade and investment. Accession to membership will have profound effects on the Jordanian economy, opening a variety of markets and creating business opportunities for the country. Other jointly sponsored seminars in December will focus on raising awareness about WTO among the Jordanian private sector, and will promote dialogue

between the public and private sectors. The series will continue into 1999, focusing on the specific aspects of accession and the impact and opportunities for Jordan business. AMIR supports these seminars with policy analyses and other programme assistance to MTI. Al Ghoul, has been involved in the accession process for Jordan since 1995, while Farhat joined AMIR a month ago, having recently advised four Central Asian republics that were going through the WTO membership process. The AMIR Programme is a four-year economic opportunities project funded by the United States Agency for International Development. In addition to the policy reform assistance mentioned above, the AMIR Programme also provides technical assistance and training in microfinance and business association support.

Aggressive inflation target hurts growth — economist

TEL AVIV (R) — Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs told a conference of Israel's economic policy makers this week that central banks should not raise interest rates to achieve aggressive inflation targets. "I don't believe in aggressive (inflation) targets," said Sachs in a statement that appeared aimed at the Bank of Israel, which has used interest rate increases as a means of reining in inflation. "Too aggressively trying to eliminate inflation" could hurt growth, he said. The Bank of Israel increased the base lending rate by 4.0 percentage points in November in response to high monthly consumer price index.

Bank of Israel Governor Jacob Frenkel said at the time of the most recent 2.0 point hike on Nov. 12 that he raised rates to achieve the government's 1999 inflation target of four per cent. Inflation this year is expected to be between nine and ten per cent, within the government's target of seven to 10 per cent but well above earlier forecasts of four per cent. Growth, meanwhile, has stagnated. The government expects gross domestic product to

expand by only 1.6 per cent in 1998 and 2.0-2.5 per cent next year. Finance Minister Yacov Neeman said he did not intend to raise the 1999 inflation target since recent jumps in the CPI might prove to be isolated responses to the shekel's depreciation in October, rather than part of an ongoing trend. "We need to wait a number of months before we evaluate the target to see if we can return to the inflation level we were at during the first half of 1998 or if this target is unattainable," he told the conference. Sachs, however, said that in terms of growth, the cost of bringing down inflation by single digits could outweigh the benefits. He added that the difference between inflation of "eight per cent, four per cent or two per cent" was not very significant and was often difficult to sustain. As part of his formula, Sachs also suggested that countries institute flexible exchange rate mechanisms, maintain tight fiscal policies and keep high foreign exchange reserve balances rather than squandering reserves to defend overvalued currencies.

Exchange Rates Thursday, 03-12-98 ACCESS 4846883											
CURRENCY	JORDAN DNR	BAHRAIN	UAE	SAR	QATAR	OMAN	YEMEN	IRAN	INDIA	THAILAND	PHILIPPINES
JORDAN DNR	1.0000	0.1888	0.1927	1.8778	1.8380	0.1944	2.3424	0.2077	0.7080	0.7080	0.7080
BAHRAIN	5.2878	1.0000	1.0011	9.9480	9.7421	1.0000	12.4083	1.1003	3.7597	3.7597	3.7597
UAE	5.1681	0.9793	1.0000	9.7425	9.5408	1.0007	12.1529	1.0776	3.6732	3.6732	3.6732
SAR	1.5325	0.1025	0.1028	1.0000	0.9793	1.0135	1.2474	0.1106	0.3770	0.3770	0.3770
QATAR	5.1434	0.9709	0.9914	9.6884	9.4864	1.0000	12.0480	1.0683	3.6415	3.6415	3.6415
OMAN	5.1434	0.9709	0.9914	9.6884	9.4864	1.0000	12.0480	1.0683	3.6415	3.6415	3.6415
YEMEN	0.4269	0.0806	0.0823	0.8017	0.7857	0.8017	9.5353	0.8017	1.1003	1.1003	1.1003
IRAN	4.8145	0.9088	0.9280	9.0409	8.8338	0.9088	11.2777	0.9088	1.1003	1.1003	1.1003
INDIA	21.4931	4.0552	4.1408	40.3416	39.5025	4.0552	47.769	50.3228	4.4621	4.4621	4.4621
THAILAND	1.4124	0.2086	0.2127	2.0523	2.0074	0.2086	2.3746	0.2086	0.7080	0.7080	0.7080
PHILIPPINES	0.8450	0.1555	0.1529	1.5568	1.5338	0.1555	1.9794	0.1555	0.5083	0.5083	0.5083
EURO	2.3334	0.4442	0.4536	4.4193	4.3278	0.4442	5.1527	0.4442	1.4688	1.4688	1.4688
SWITZERLAND	1.9218	0.3628	0.3704	3.6067	3.5340	0.3628	4.3076	0.3628	1.1003	1.1003	1.1003
FRANCE	7.8894	1.4892	1.5207	14.8150	14.5083	1.4892	18.4004	1.4892	4.5083	4.5083	4.5083
GERMANY	1.6768	0.3165	0.3232	3.1485	3.0836	0.3165	3.9279	0.3165	0.9683	0.9683	0.9683
NETHERLANDS	2.0508	0.3804	0.3910	3.9778	3.8748	0.3804	4.5154	0.3804	1.1003	1.1003	1.1003
ITALY	11.3710	2.1426	2.1918	21.3540	20.9119	2.1426	26.6372	2.1426	6.6372	6.6372	6.6372
SPAIN	16.4971	3.0844	3.1492	31.7554	31.1486	3.0844	38.5003	3.0844	9.6837	9.6837	9.6837
PORTUGAL	48.5452	8.1836	8.3570	81.1559	79.2727	8.1836	99.4084	8.1836	24.0830	24.0830	24.0830
AUSTRALIA	2.2581	0.4262	0.4352	4.2403	4.1523	0.4262	5.1055	0.4262	1.2687	1.2687	1.2687
NEW ZEALAND	3.9587	0.7453	0.7651	7.4543	7.2503	0.7453	9.0778	0.7453	2.2687	2.2687	2.2687
GREEK DRACHM	116.7200	198.4405	201.2200	197.2556	194.2556	198.4405	239.5666	198.4405	594.8416	594.8416	594.8416
CYPRUS POUND	1.9768	0.3731	0.3824	3.7304	3.6380	0.3731	4.5000	0.3731	1.1003	1.1003	1.1003
ISRAELI SHEQEL	8.0111	1.5474	1.5820	15.4743	15.1414	1.5474	18.7816	1.5474	4.8031	4.8031	4.8031
ITALY LIRA	16.4971	2.1426	2.1918	21.3540	20.9119	2.1426	26.6372	2.1426	6.6372	6.6372	6.6372
NETHERLANDS GILDER	34.3700	5.7445	5.8970	57.4455	56.2569	5.7445	69.5000	5.7445	15.0000	15.0000	15.0000
GERMANY MARK	1.6768	0.3165	0.3232	3.1485	3.0836	0.3165	3.9279	0.3165	0.9683	0.9683	0.9683
AUSTRALIA DOLLAR	2.2581	0.4262	0.4352	4.2403	4.1523	0.4262	5.1055	0.4262	1.2687	1.2687	1.2687
CYPRUS POUND	2.0508	0.3804	0.3910	3.9778	3.8748	0.3804	4.5154	0.3804	1.1003	1.1003	1.1003
NETHERLANDS GILDER	11.3710	2.1426	2.1918	21.3540	20.9119	2.1426	26.6372	2.1426	6.6372	6.6372	6.6372
ISRAELI SHEQEL	1.5750	0.2989	0.3028	3.0282	2.9722	0.2989	3.6189	0.2989	0.8184	0.8184	0.8184
CANADA DOLLAR	0.8455	0.1513	0.1529	1.5295	1.5040	0.1513	1.8747	0.1513	0.4525	0.4525	0.4525

Deflation threatens global economy — Japan report

TOKYO (AFP) — The global economy is threatened with growing deflationary pressures which could lead to recession, a Japanese government report has warned. Japan, the United States and Europe should work to counter the global risks, said the annual Economic Planning Agency report titled White Paper on the World Economy.

It cited the threats of a possible downturn in the U.S. share market, a prolonged economic slump in Japan, devaluation of the Chinese yuan and further increase in the U.S. trade deficit. "If these risks materialise in a chain reaction or simultaneously, the world economy will be substan-

tially affected and a global recession is not at all a remote possibility in the worst case scenario," the agency warned. Crisis-hit Asian economies will be in trouble for several years because their export-led recovery plans cannot deliver a quick return to a growth, the report forecast. "It will be very difficult for five countries hit by the currency and financial crises in East Asia to return to a growth path with exports leading the way as quickly as Mexico did," it said. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand were not following the same tight monetary and fiscal poli-

cies that led Mexico's recovery from financial crisis in 1994, said its annual report. The agency said the Asian crisis had not wiped out these nations' growth potential, however, and "their return to a high-growth path is possible." The likely scenario for Asia was a gradual improvement of the trade balance and inflows of foreign capital, it said. This upturn would allow Asian nations to cut interest rates and stimulate personal consumption and investment, the report said. The Economic Planning Agency, however, warned against sweeping regulations of investment capital flows. Free movements of capital benefitted the global economy by redistributing financial resources, it said. "Liberalisation of capital movement should be well sequenced and prudent and it is important to distinguish long- and short-term capital," said the agency.

Philippines officially plunges into recession

MANILA (AFP) — The Philippine economy went into recession in the third quarter, according to official data, but the government and private economists remained upbeat about growth prospects. Economic Planning Secretary Felipe Medalla said gross domestic product (GDP) contracted 0.1 per cent in the three months to September. It was the second successive quarterly GDP decline after a 1.2 per cent fall in the three months to June. Two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth technically constitute a recession. The Philippines became the eighth recession casualty in Asia, following Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand,

Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore. However, Medalla insisted the country had "successfully escaped recession," citing gross national product (GNP) growth of 0.8 per cent in the third quarter. GNP takes into account income acquiring from abroad. He said the government used GNP as its basis for computing a recession, adding that GDP figures might eventually be revised upward since they did not include certain items in calculating the data. Medalla credited the difference between the GNP and the GDP performance to the remittances of about four million Filipinos working overseas.

He also said average GNP of one per cent for the whole year was still "feasible" and a 0.5 per cent GDP target was "still within reach." "In a sea of very negative growth in the region this is really positive news," Medalla told reporters. The drop in the GDP was blamed on the agriculture and fisheries sector which declined 3.1 per cent in the September quarter due largely to effects of a drought spawned by the El Nino atmospheric phenomenon. Industry was also down 1.7 per cent while manufacturing and services inched up 0.9 per cent and 2.6 per cent, respectively. Medalla also expressed

optimism the country would enjoy 3.5 per cent GNP growth and three per cent GDP expansion in 1999 as the effects of the Asian financial crisis faded. "The state of the local economy is that it has bottomed out and we are quite bullish about 1999," he added. President Joseph Estrada, in a speech to businessmen an hour before the GNP figures were released, said: "We are confident that the Philippines will soon recover from the Asian financial crisis." He cited the stability of the foreign exchange rate, the fall in inflation and interest rates and the strength of the banking sector compared to other countries in the region.

Francis Varela, an economist with Asian Bank, a local bank, noted that even with the negative GDP figure, "we would still be in a much better situation than the other countries in Asia because our declines have been milder compared to countries like Thailand and Indonesia." The government had previously been boasting that the Philippines was likely to escape a recession altogether, making it stand-out further among Asian nations. "Obviously there will be some dampened enthusiasm there," now that the figures are out, Varela said, but added that investor interest would still continue.

SHOP AHEAD!!!
AVOID THE SEASON'S RUSH

DAJANI
Amman Forum Hotel Commercial Annex
Phone: (932) 5527118 Fax: 5527119
P.O. Box 7576 Amman - Jordan

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS
1 Movie award
6 Cradle call
10 Come up short
14 Put into words
15 First husband?
16 Does something
17 Rides the waves
18 Cuckoo
20 Kidnap
22 High craps
23 Holiday lead-in
24 Auto maintenance
26 Routine duties
28 Decisive
31 Viewed
32 Thrust
33 Quenchers
35 Costa —
36 Fizz
39 Tide type
40 Laurel and Mikita
42 Bees' home
43 Offers relief
44 from discomfort
45 Ye Shoppe
46 Earthly paradise
47 Water pitcher
49 Library patrons
51 Set of steps
54 "Camille" star
55 Alien craft
56 Inland sea of Asia
58 Finnish baths
62 Immediately
65 Discount buy, briefly
66 "La Douce"
67 Ripped
68 Bmg joy
69 Distribute hands
70 Pub preferences
71 Make lawn repairs

DOWN
1 Mountain in Thessaly
2 Torn ticket
3 Joker
4 Quickly
5 Firefighter's feat
6 Baudelaire's "Les fleurs du mal"
7 Mine entrances
8 Type of shark
9 Set an arbitrary punishment
10 Vegas
11 Orange shade
12 Applause
13 Sen. Kefauver
19 Fire residue
21 Ski-slope devices
25 Newspaper employee
27 Quickly
28 Horse hair
29 Inking
30 Oceans
31 Day
34 Coolidge casually
36 Take the bus
37 Beyond

38 Writing tools
41 Oracles
44 Workout
45 List of lagers
50 Decreaser
51 Guesseme
52 In flames
53 Religious tenet
54 Angry gaze
57 USAF trait
58 Long and Peeples
60 Countertop
61 Luge
63 Linden of "Barney Miller"
64 Affirmative

Peanuts

IF YOU'RE GOING TO FLY SOUTH, I SUGGEST YOU'D BETTER GET STARTED.

YES TODAY IS SATURDAY. WHAT'S WRONG WITH TRAVELING ON SATURDAY?

WORMS ARE CLOSED ON THE WEEKEND?

Andy Capp

AND THAT DIT (I DON'T KNOW, I'VE LOST A FOUND THIS WEEK).

YOU'LL NEVER DO IT, MURDER! YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT!

TAKE NO NOTICE, MURDER! HE'S BEEN DOWN YESTERDAY.

Mutt'n' Jeff

WE NEED A PISKIN! WHAT DID HE SAY, MUTT?

THE COACH SAID THEY CAN'T START PLAYIN' WITHOUT A PISKIN!

HERE YOU ARE, COACH! A GENUINE PISKIN AND HER WHOLE FAMILY!

THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen

GIASBERGEN

"Now isn't a good time to talk. I argue better after I've forgotten what I was angry about."

JUMBLE THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Aronson

Unscramble these four jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

MYPUB
TOJUS
BLOGON
JORNAG

Answer: A

Yesterday's Jumbles: NIPPY LATHE SEPTIC PURVEY
Answer: The kind of audience the zookeeper had when he washed the cage — "CAPTIVE"

Business Daily
A review of

Water sector capital spend

THE RECENT...
...the water sector...
...capital spend...
...the water sector...
...capital spend...

HOROSC
FORECAST FOR SATURDAY

...the water sector...
...capital spend...
...the water sector...
...capital spend...

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Water sector to receive lion's share of capital spending in next year's budget

**** THE RECURRENT** spending is estimated at JD1.683 million in the 1999 budget or 78 per cent of the budget which totals JD2.160 million for next year. Capital spending is expected to account for the remaining 22 per cent, or JD477 million.

The government targets a budget deficit of seven per cent of the total gross domestic product, estimated at JD5.540 million, or about JD378.8 million. The Council of Ministers is expected to endorse the 1999 draft budget Saturday and to transfer it to the Lower House on the same day in order to specify the time for debating it. The Cabinet on Tuesday approved an addendum to the 1998 budget totalling JD133 million.

Local revenues for next year were estimated at around JD1.782.3, representing more than 80 per cent of the total budget noting that "a good saving was achieved between recurrent revenues and recurrent savings." Wages of civil servants were estimated at JD352 million or 16.3 per cent of the total budget.

A JD35 million amount was budgeted for the projects of the Social Productivity Programme but the funds earmarked for food subsidies were lowered by the same figure expected from the cuts in bread prices early next year. An informed source said that in return for cutting bread prices, the subsidy will be lifted except to those who are beneficiaries from the National Aid Fund and military personnel.

Subsidies will continue for other

foodstuffs but specifically to benefit those who earn less than JD500 a month. The source said that no decision was taken regarding the allocations for wheat subsidy although it was extended. "The government preferred to leave the issue for discussion with the legislative authority within the framework of dialogue that will start with the deputies to arrive at a suitable equation that would satisfy the Lower House," the source added.

The 1999 budget focused on two main aspects the first being the social dimension and the second in covering all types of expenditures so as there would be no way to issue any addendums for the budget.

The water sector took the lion's share of capital spending in next year's budget and an independent budget was formulated for each governorate. As such, the general budget took into consideration the principle of decentralisation but all venues of spending in the governorates were tied to the central authority in Amman through the ministries and departments to the directorates in each governorate.

The source indicated that the targeted seven per cent deficit was in harmony with the expected growth rate and money supply. The deficit, which was calculated based on detailed financial and monetary studies, has left a share of the credits to the private sector. Allocations were also budgeted to repay instalments of loans and interest (Al Ra'i).

AFM from 98-11-28 to 98-12-02
ACCESS 4646888

COMPANY	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE
BANKS			
ARAB BK	203.900	211.000	+3.50%
INTL BK	1.870	1.800	-3.70%
BL OF JO	1.080	1.100	+1.80%
INDUSTRIAL BK	1.230	1.200	-2.40%
THE HOUSING BK	2.800	2.700	-3.50%
JO KUNAWT BK	1.880	1.880	0.00%
JO GULF BK	0.700	0.700	0.00%
ARAB BK INVEST	2.200	2.200	0.00%
JO ISLAMIC BK	1.580	1.580	0.00%
UNION BK	0.850	0.850	0.00%
JO INVESTMENT BK	1.420	1.420	0.00%
BEST ELAL	0.880	0.880	0.00%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.810	0.810	0.00%

BANKS INDEX 278.040 POINT +1.88%

COMPANY	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE
INSURANCE			
GENERAL ARABIA BK	2.040	2.040	0.00%
GENERAL ARABIA BK	1.280	1.280	0.00%
JO FRESH INS	2.740	2.800	+2.10%
ARAB INS	1.920	1.920	0.00%
JO GULF INS	1.220	1.220	0.00%
ARABIA INS	1.300	1.300	0.00%

INSURANCE INDEX 128.150 POINT -0.85%

COMPANY	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.470	1.450	-1.30%
RRID ELECTRICITY	1.280	1.280	0.00%
VEHICLES OWNERS	1.880	2.000	+6.40%
ARAB RYTHOTEL	2.700	2.700	0.00%
SHIPPING LINES	1.020	1.020	0.00%
PORTFOLIO SECURITY	0.780	0.810	+3.90%
REAL ESTATE	2.700	2.700	0.00%
JO INTL TRADING CO	0.280	0.310	+10.70%
AL RAJ	0.280	0.280	0.00%
COMMODORE	0.020	0.020	0.00%
AL ZARQA FOR EDU	0.820	0.820	0.00%
ARAB RYTHOTEL	1.900	1.900	0.00%
UNION LAND DEV	0.810	0.810	0.00%
UNION LAND TRAVEL	1.000	1.000	0.00%
UNION FINANCIAL	1.000	1.000	0.00%

SERVICES INDEX 102.880 POINT -0.39%

COMPANY	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE
INDUSTRY			
AT-TANDEEP	1.100	1.100	0.00%
CEMENT	2.440	2.400	-1.60%
TRIGRAMATE	1.720	1.740	+1.10%
ARAB POTASH	3.120	3.120	0.00%
PETROLEUM REFIN	10.220	10.220	0.00%
JO TANNING	6.300	6.300	0.00%
WOOLLEN IND	0.850	0.850	0.00%
THE IND COMM & AG	1.230	1.240	+0.80%
MOISTURED MILLS	0.500	0.500	0.00%
ARAB PHARMACEUT	0.200	0.200	0.00%
CELANESE IND	1.070	1.130	+5.60%
JO DARY	2.800	2.800	0.00%
TOBACCO & CIGARE	1.180	1.180	0.00%
JO PEPES	1.070	1.070	0.00%
ARAB CHEMICAL DET	0.340	0.340	0.00%
NTL STEEL	0.170	0.170	0.00%
NARA	0.540	0.540	0.00%
DAR AL DAWA	0.310	0.310	0.00%
INDUSTRIAL COMPL	0.870	0.870	0.00%
JO STEEL	0.870	0.870	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.730	2.000	+15.00%
COLORADO	0.410	0.410	0.00%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.410	0.410	0.00%
PAPER CONVERTING	0.700	0.720	+2.80%
NTL WIP	0.410	0.410	0.00%
PETRO CHEMICAL	0.200	0.200	0.00%
ROCKWOOL	0.530	0.540	+1.90%
JO CHEMICAL	0.800	0.800	0.00%
UNIVERSAL CHEM	0.200	0.200	0.00%
GENERAL WIVES	0.200	0.200	0.00%
NTL CABLE	0.540	0.540	0.00%
SULPHUR CHEMICAL	0.200	0.200	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR P	1.100	1.100	0.00%
KAWTHIR	0.380	0.420	+10.50%
EL-ZAY	1.100	1.110	+0.90%
UNIVERSAL MODERN	0.200	0.200	0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0.380	0.420	+10.50%
NEW CAPLES	0.200	0.200	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.880	0.720	-18.20%

INDUSTRY INDEX 72.450 POINT -0.12%

COMPANY	OPEN	CLOSE	CHANGE
PARALLEL			
EXPORT BILTS	0.830	0.810	-2.40%
JO TRADING FACULTY	0.380	0.400	+5.30%
CENTRAL STORE	0.270	0.300	+11.10%
UNION INVEST CORP	0.640	0.720	+12.50%
AL-BIGAD	0.200	0.200	0.00%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.540	0.520	-3.70%
AL-SHARH	0.880	0.880	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCE	0.580	0.580	0.00%
AL DAWAN	0.580	0.580	0.00%
ARAB INVESTORS	1.000	0.950	-5.00%
ARAB RYTHOTEL	0.200	0.200	0.00%
JO INVESTMENT	0.200	0.200	0.00%
READY MIX CONCRETE	0.740	0.780	+5.30%
CENTURY	0.580	0.570	-1.70%
NTL POLYMER	0.200	0.200	0.00%
TEXTILE & PLASTIC	0.200	0.200	0.00%
ELECTRICAL WIP	0.350	0.350	0.00%
JO INVESTMENT	0.200	0.200	0.00%
UNION TOBACCO	2.200	2.200	0.00%
AL-RAB	0.580	0.540	-6.90%
UNION ENR IND	1.120	1.120	0.00%
NTL CERAMIC	0.420	0.410	-2.40%
NTL TEXTILE MAHU	0.140	0.150	+7.10%
NTL POLYMER	0.200	0.200	0.00%
JO INVESTMENT	0.200	0.200	0.00%
JO INVESTMENT	0.200	0.200	0.00%
JO INVESTMENT	0.200	0.200	0.00%
JO INVESTMENT	0.200	0.200	0.00%

GRAND INDEX 164.84 POINT +1.20%

EU: 500,000 information technology jobs going begging for lack of skill

BRUSSELS (AFP) — Over 500,000 jobs in Europe's information technology (IT) sector are currently unfilled because of skill shortages, a European Commission report said this week.

A failure to address these shortages urgently will "carry a heavy price" for European Union (EU) countries growth and competitiveness, as well as for employment levels, the report warned.

To address the crisis, the commission said the EU had to do more to encourage start-up firms in the sector and boost IT training in schools and colleges as well as for people already in work.

Underlining the potential of information-related industries, the report said the EU audiovisual market would grow by 70 per cent by 2005, creating up to 300,000 new jobs. Another 150,000 jobs would be created if other EU countries matched Finland's mobile phone density.

A report published by U.S. computer giant Microsoft in September said that the number of unfilled IT jobs in Europe will have grown to 1.6 million by 2002, seriously undermining the capacity of Europe's businesses to embrace new technologies like the Internet.

That report warned that the huge tasks of adapting

computer systems to cope with the millennium bug and the switchover to the single European currency were soaking up scarce IT personnel, preventing companies from addressing issues like the training and reskilling of the broader workforce.

Over four million people currently work in IT industries in the EU, accounting for five per cent of the bloc's gross domestic product.

Bernard Vergnes, the chairman of Microsoft Europe, has said the number of IT workers could reach 12 million by 2002 if the sector's potential was fully realised.

Qatar attracts lenders but pays more as oil price slides

DOHA (R) — Comforted by Qatar's huge gas reserves and big name development projects, foreign banks continue to lend millions of dollars to the Arab Gulf state despite this year's dive in oil prices, bankers and officials say.

But the price slide combined with financial turmoil in other emerging markets is forcing Qatar, a tiny oil producer with seven per cent of the world's gas reserves, to pay a premium to attract lenders.

The latest in a string of loans was signed this week when banks lent \$510 million to fund expansion plans by refinery National Oil Distribution Co (Nodco). Next week, another group is to lend \$475 million to Qatar Vinyl Co, a petrochemical firm.

They follow hard on the heels of a \$100 million facility arranged in July by regional banks for a new five-star hotel. "You will see more deals being signed in the next two months," Finance Minister Youssef Hussein Kamal told Reuters.

The deals raise the tally of Qatar's external debt built up over the past four years to more than \$12 billion, or 130 per cent of gross domestic product.

Three-quarters of these are project-related and non-recourse finance, so repayment starts after the project is commissioned and they are not directly guaranteed by the state. Still, most ventures have state-owned firms as majority shareholders. "The massive drop in crude oil prices has not altered the international financial community's perceptions about the Qatar economy," Paribas Chairman Andre Levy-Lang said.

"The fundamentals remain strong and the outlook for the economy is bright," he said on a recent visit to Doha. Paribas

arranged the Qatar Vinyl Co loan.

Bankers said the presence of big foreign firms in Qatari ventures was a major attraction to project financiers. Qatar Vinyl's foreign partners include Norway's Norsk Hydro and a unit of France's Elf Aquitaine.

Another source of confidence is Qatar's huge gas reserves, the basis of its drive to develop new industry. Until these plans are realised, Qatar is relying on its small oil reserves.

"With around seven per cent of the world's gas reserves concentrated in its continental shelf and a pragmatic political leadership, Qatar still represents investors' paradise," said an economist working with a Qatari bank, who asked not to be named.

But turmoil in emerging markets is taking its toll, forcing up loan prices and encouraging

Qatar to put off a bond issue.

"Higher margins on loans are inevitable, as you see in the Nodco case. But these are mainly due to the Asian crisis and a general deterioration in the economic climate and are not going to starve good projects of financing," the economist said.

The nine-year Nodco loan was priced at between 55 basis points (bps) over the London Interbank Offered Rate (LIBOR) for the first four years, 65 bps for years five and six and 85 bps for the remaining three years. Nodco is a subsidiary of state-owned Qatar General Petroleum Corp.

In 1997, the pricing for Qatar's sovereign borrowing on five-year loans, each worth between \$300 million-\$500 million, rose during the year from 30 bps to 40 bps over LIBOR.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) There are a lot of people you'd like to see, but you'd be wise to have them come to your neighbourhood instead of the other way around. You've got plenty of stuff you can interest them in, and it will save you resources and energy. Both of those are scarcer commodities than you'd like to admit.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) This would be a great weekend to learn a new skill. Since money is still an issue, how about learning to make something you can sell? People tend to go into buying frenzies this time of year, so you might find a ready market for your product. You already know how to pinch pennies. Now, try to find ways to generate income.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Looks like you're in a penny-pinching mood. That means it's a good time to go shopping, especially if you and your partner need to buy something together. Figuring out what could be a challenge. You both have strong ideas. If your money is involved, make sure you get your two cents' worth in.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You have to stand up for what you want in order to get it, and today is no exception. You and someone you live with could clash temporarily. The other person may be in a rotten mood, but you can overpower him or her with a great combination of sweetness and strength. Be polite, but stay in control.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) You're taking little jaunts down memory lane today. You may even have had a dream about the past last night — past romances, conversations, plans that you and a certain someone were making for the future. The problem is that you have a little gap between the fantasy and the reality. Today, work on bridging that gap.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Your friends would love you to join them in a fun-filled afternoon. Your house would certainly be most convenient for you, so why not invite them over? It looks like your home is the best place for a gathering this afternoon and all through the weekend, so the more the merrier!

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 23) An older person wants to dominate your time today, so go ahead and submit. You can impress this person with the skills you've recently learned, so you can show off as well. Be polite, well-mannered and a little deferent to the other's authority. In short, be respectful; the respect you receive in return will be even greater.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) You've worked hard this week and you deserve a little relaxation. You like a big group of people around, and you treat them all like family. That's one reason they hang around with you. The other reason is that you've just so much fun. Having a group involved with your activities this weekend will keep expenses down, too.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You could make a good deal today if you're willing to barter. You're sometimes good at that, but if your heart isn't in it, you could be the other person's dream instead. If you think the other person needs the money more than you do, give him or her a tip instead of trying to get the very best price. This is a **CAPRICORN:** (December 22 to January 19) This is a great day for innovation. You and a friend can develop brilliant ideas. Your ideas build as the other person offers suggestions, and the same thing happens back. This synergy generates an enormous wave of energy, with which you can carry out just about anything you can dream up. What fun!

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) Here it is the weekend, but you have to work. Well, it's not so bad. You goofed off most of the week, and now you get to make up for it. You can concentrate a little better today than you could during the week. It's not necessarily fun, but it is a little easier to keep your mind on the task at hand.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) Looks like romance this weekend. It's about time. You've been trying to do lots of different things all week, and your nerves may be shot by now. You still have some exciting and scary opportunities. Discuss them with a person who always seems to understand. It'll help you calm down and make a good decision.

Birth Stone of December: Turquoise — Zircon

Hotel InterContinental Jordan Interfit SPA celebrates 1st anniversary

HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL Jordan celebrates today the 1st anniversary of the Interfit Spa. The Interfit Spa which was officially opened last year by Minister of Tourism & Antiquities Akel Biltaji has become the talk of the town in Amman. The spa offers its members a state-of-the-art gym equipped with the best machines to ensure your fitness and enjoyment. The Interfit Spa encompasses a beautiful indoor pool, sauna, steamrooms, a healthy juice bar with a wide range of tempting healthy food and drinks, a boutique displaying an extensive range of cosmetics, make up, gift packs and sports wear.

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LOCAL SPORTS SCENE

Jarrar wins speed test

AMMAN — Jordan's Yaser Jarrar driving a Renault Turbo GT won first place of the second Auto-Sports Complex Speed Test, which was held Friday with 25 racers taking part in commemoration of the late Nazmi Al Saeed, one of the Kingdom's sport pioneers, who passed away last month. Amir Najjar achieved second place while Khaled Sa'i, who won the first speed test, took third place. The Jordan Press Foundation — Al Ra'i and other parties provided trophies, medals and cash awards to the top three winners.

Football federation to name new national team

AMMAN — The Technical Committee of the Jordan Football Association is preparing a proposed project for a mechanism to reshuffle the national team and study the training situation after the federation cancelled contracts of several trainers. A preliminary list of the reshuffle will be submitted today which will include 40 players from the national team, as well as the under-23 and under-19 categories.

Jordan might host media seminar

AMMAN — Jordan and Egypt were nominated to host a media seminar held by the Arab Table Tennis Federation during next March or April 1999. Around 20 participants from Arab countries are expected to take part in the event.

Football Association to meet clubs

AMMAN — The Jordan Football Association will soon discuss the possibility of holding a joint meeting with the presidents of the seven Premier League clubs to discuss distributing proceeds and marketing championships. The meeting comes after the clubs' objection on the previous method in which the federation decided to market the 1998 league through a consortium in line with a JD300,000 contract.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

World Cup euphoria triggers record French crowds

PARIS (R) — World Cup euphoria has triggered record attendances at French clubs this season.

Nearly three million people watched first division matches between August and November, up more than 500,000 on last season, according to league statistics published Friday. Olympique Marseille's Velodrome, whose capacity was increased by a third to 60,000 for the World Cup, had the highest average rate of 52,780 and the biggest crowd of the season, 56,346, for the visit of Paris St Germain last Sunday.

Marseille's average rate is higher than the accumulated average for France's six least popular first division teams that include Monaco, AJ Auxerre and Bastia.

It is also some 10,000 greater than PSG, who have averaged 42,225 at their 48,500-capacity Parc des Princes stadium.

The average league rate is 19,728 per match so far this season, the statistics show.

RC Lens, on the verge of a place in the European Cup quarter-finals, are the third biggest crowd-pullers with an average rate of 34,564. France won their first World Cup on July 12 in Paris, beating Brazil 3-2 in the final.

Jordan adamant on stand in handball controversy

Hamdan threatens to resign from Asian federation

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Kingdom Friday announced that it would freeze membership in the Asian Handball Federation (AHF) if the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) fails to issue a fair ruling regarding Jordan's recent "unjust disqualification" from the World Championship finals.

Jordan Handball Federation (JHF) President Sari Hamdan reiterated that Jordan was firm in its stand and quest for a fair solution as it had officially qualified to the finals which will be held in Egypt next June.

"There was a complete disregard to internal regulations and norms. If that continues we have no option but to freeze membership in the AHF. I will also submit my resignation from the AHF," Hamdan told reporters at a press conference Friday.

The issue emerged at the West Asian qualifiers where hosts Saudi Arabia took first place, while Jordan came runner up and officially qualified.

However, following Jordan's 32-19 win over Bahrain, the technical committee of the championship announced that Kuwait qualified as runner up when Bahrain's results were cancelled due to technicality in their final match against Jordan.

The technical committee scrapped Bahrain's results at the championship citing that Bahrain had handed Jordan the win by passive play in the second half.

"Bahrain did not pull out nor did it hand us the win. On the contrary, they were trying hard to narrow the gap," Hamdan said.

"The technical committee of any championship does not have the authority to take decisions but should leave that to the federation. Similarly Asian or international regulations do not stipulate cancelling the entire results of a team but rather considering a withdrawing team as loser by a 10-0 score."

Hamdan also pointed out that the Slovenian referees of the match did not advise that Bahrain had a technical error but it was rather the techni-

cal committee who took that decision single-handedly.

Jordan has since lodged a complaint with the OCA which meets under the chairmanship of Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahd Al Sabah on Dec. 9 on the sidelines of the Asian Games which open in Bangkok Sunday.

Hamdan said if the OCA fails to issue a fair ruling, the matter would be appealed with the World Handball Federation.

Hamdan said Jordan now had a ranking on the map of Asian Handball after recent activity on the club and national team levels. Furthermore, he stressed that the men's and women's teams were training hard for the upcoming Pan-Arab Games in Amman.

Bahrain has meanwhile lodged an appeal with the OCA and the World Handball Federation citing "injustice to the Bahraini team" which had players suspended in their match against Jordan before the technical committee cancelled their results.

Sulayyem clinches Dubai Rally in style Bustami sixth, as three Jordanians complete rally

DUBAI (J.T.)

Mohammad Bin Sulayyem maintained his dominance of the Dubai International Rally Friday by winning his home event for the 11th time in 14 years, while fellow UAE driver Sheikh Abdullah Al Qassimi clinched his first Middle East success.

Jordan's Bashar Bustami marked his return after a six-month lay-off by finishing sixth in his Mitsubishi Lancer, ahead of the rally's fastest Formula Two driver, Roger Feghali, the Lebanese national champion who revelled in his first overseas event.

Three of the five Jordanian entries also made it to the finish line. Faris Bustami finished 9th and Lee Dunn 16th.

Jordan's 1997 champion Mohammad Daoud quit the rally on the first day with mechanical trouble. Ammar Haddad, who was 15th on the first day, did not finish the rally.

Completing an emphatic start-to-finish victory, Sulayyem rounded off his tenth Middle East Championship winning season in style to underline his supremacy in the regional series. And Al Qassimi made it a UAE championship double, finishing fourth overall to overtake Aussie, Ron Cremen, and clinch the Middle East Group N title for production cars.

After recording the fastest time in 13 of the event's 16 special stages, the Arab World's No. 1 driver was first back to the Rally HQ, at the Al Bustan Rotana Hotel, seven minutes and 35 seconds clear of his closest challenger, the UAE's Rashid Ben Ghurab.

"It was a very good rally for me," he said. "I love the

new stages. They made it very easy for people to go and watch. I'm very happy for Ford that we won six out of six events this year to keep our 100 per cent record through the season."

Ghurab completed a memorable performance to finish second, powering Sulayyem's former Ford Escort Cosworth ahead of Al Qassimi in the tenth stage, and then moving past Michel Saleh in the 14th stage for the runners-up spot.

While Sulayyem cruised to victory, Ghurab set the fastest time on two stages Friday, increasing the pressure on Saleh as the route took them from Dubai Creek and the Marmon district into the Al Dhaid area for the first time. And as Ghurab turned over the heat, he snatched second place when the UAE-based Lebanese driver suffered a puncture and stalled his engine after a titanic struggle.

But there was no catching Sulayyem, whose Ford World Rally Car remained in total control to earn his 46th international victory, enhancing his status as the world's most successful driver in FIA championship rallying.

Held under the patronage of Sheikh Ahmad Ben Saeed Al Maktoum, president of Dubai Civil Aviation Department, the rally is organised by the Automobile and Touring Club for the UAE, the national motor sport authority.

Dubai Ports Authority and Jebel Ali Free Zone were the official sponsors, with Danka Kodak official suppliers of photocopyers and Emirates computers official suppliers of computers. Ghazal Al Wadi Towing



Fans cheer for UAE ace Mohammad Ben Sulayyem during the final day of the Dubai rally, Friday, the last leg of the regional series. Sulayyem, already the Middle East champion, won his home event for a record 11th time ahead of Dubai driver Rashid Ben Ghurab. Sheikh Abdullah Al Qassimi of Sharjah in fourth place became the Group N champion, while Cypriot driver Nearchos Nearchou won the Formula 2 title (AFP photo)

Services (GTS) also provided vital support.

The biggest smile of the day belonged to Al Qassimi who finished one place ahead of his season-long rival Cremen in fifth to clinch the Group N title and complete a UAE clean sweep of the leading four places in the Dubai event.

Trailing the 1996 Group N champion by just one point going into the Dubai Rally, Qassimi took advantage of home knowledge of finish with a comfortable six-minute cushion and decide one of the most dramatic battles ever seen for a Middle East rally title.

"I'm very pleased, winning my first Middle East title is a new feeling," said Qassimi. "I had a perfect rally and everything went well. Yesterday, we pushed very hard to build up a good lead over Ron and today I just concentrated on winning the Group N title."

Cremen's consolation was that he pipped Al Qassimi for second spot in the overall standings in the Middle East Championship. There was high drama in the chase for the region's

Formula Two crown, with Nearchos Nearchou overcoming horrendous mechanical problems to crawl across the finish line to clinch the title.

Second day casualties included Austrian veteran Rudi Stohl, who was forced to retire on the day's second stage when his Audi's engine burst into flames. The historic cars' only second day starter, a Ford GT 350 driven by Paul Kane, battled its way to the finish to pave the way for the new category to blossom in next season's Middle East Championship.

There was high drama in the chase for the region's

European soccer

Revitalised Juventus and Lazio meet in crunch clash

ROME (R) — Italian Champions Juventus and Italian Cup holders Lazio, both revitalised by good mid-week performances, meet in a crunch clash at the Stadio Delle Alpi in Turin on Sunday.

Both sides have been in poor form in recent league matches with Juventus losing two of their last four games and with Lazio losing three of their last five.

Last Sunday, Juventus were humbled in a 3-0 defeat by Bologna while Lazio were held to a 3-3 draw in their Rome derby with AS Roma, conceding two late goals to their city cousins.

Champions Juventus come into Sunday's game in fifth place, four points behind leaders Fiorentina while visitors Lazio are 10th, eight points behind the leaders.

Both Juventus coach Marcello Lippi and his Lazio counterpart, Swede Sven Eriksson, however, believe that the worst is behind them now, taking heart for good mid-week performances.

On Wednesday, Juventus drew their postponed Champions League tie with Turkish side Galatasaray 1-1 in Istanbul while on Thursday Lazio beat Inter Milan 2-1 in an Italian Cup quarter final, first leg.

Lippi said on Friday: "I was very satisfied with our demonstration of solidity and strength in Istanbul. I get the impression that there are whole lot of people around me just waiting to write the words "end the line" alongside the name Juventus."

"However we're every intention of putting off that day as long as possible and what's more, we're convinced we can do so."

Sweden Sven Eriksson likewise took comfort from Lazio's Cup win against Inter. "We're on the way back. I'm convinced that we're

finally heading in the right direction but we must now play well in Turin to round off a positive week for us."

Juventus, without long-term injury victim Alessandro Del Piero, continue to field the makeshift strike force of Filippo Inzaghi, partnered by Frenchman Jocelyn Blanchard replaces injured Dutchman Edgar Davids alongside compatriot Didier Deschamps. Angelo Di Livio and Antonio Conte.

Gianluca Pessotto drops back from midfield to left back to replace suspended Yugoslav Zoran Mirkovic while reserve goalkeeper Michelangelo Rampulla comes in for the injured Angelo Peruzzi.

Lazio, as usual this season, have injury problems with Czech Pavel Nedved the latest to join an injury list that includes strikers Christian Vieri and Croat Alen Boksic as well as Australian midfielder Paul Okon and Portuguese

defender Fernando Couto while Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic is suspended.

Roberto Mancini and Chilena Marcelo Salas continue to lead the Lazio attack while Italian international defender Alessandro Nesta may return to feature in his first Serie A game since injuring himself in the opening minutes of Italy's first round game against Austria at France '98.

Nesta made his comeback in the cup tie against Inter on Thursday, coming on at halftime to give an authoritative second half performance.

The record books holds out little hope for Lazio, however, since the Rome club has won only five out of 35 league games played against Juventus in Turin. Last season, too, Lazio fared badly against Juventus, losing 2-1 in Turin in December and 1-0 in Rome in April.

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LOD (AP) — The United States is considering whether President Clinton will land at the newly opened Palestinian airport later this month, a U.S. official said Thursday. Israel fears such a move would boost Palestinian sovereignty claims.

Clinton is to arrive in Israel on Dec. 12 and is to fly to the Gaza Strip on Dec. 14 to usher in the second stage of the Wye River land-for-security agreement he helped negotiate.

A Clinton landing at Gaza International, which opened last week as part of the agreement, had been considered by the White House.

David Bar-Illan, a senior adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said earlier Thursday that the Israeli government felt a presidential landing in Gaza "was tantamount to recognising [Palestinian] sovereignty," something Israel rejects.

However, Bar-Illan said later that Israel had not officially requested that Clinton refrain from using the airstrip.

The U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Clinton's travel plans had not been finalised. The official said the administration was considering the Israeli concerns.

The Palestinians consider the airport, their first gateway to the world, a strong symbol of fledgling independence. The airport opened after more than two years of disputes between Israel and the Palestinians over security considerations.

For now, Israel's government

DAMASCUS (R) — Syria and Iraq stressed during talks in Damascus on Thursday their legal and historical rights to share the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers which flow to both countries from Turkey, officials said.

They said Syrian Irrigation Ministers Abdul-Rahman Madani and his Iraqi counterpart Mahmood Diyab Al Ahmad also discussed how to promote cooperation in irrigation.

"The two ministers stressed that water should be used as a method to promote cooperation and friendship among the three countries who share the rivers, Syria, Iraq and Turkey," one official said.

"The two ministers also stressed the historical and legal rights of Syria and Iraq to the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris," he added.

The official said the ministers agreed to resume meetings of the joint Syrian-Iraqi Irrigation Committee to discuss issues related to water-sharing in accordance with international law.

Syria and Iraq had invited Turkey to resume participation

BEIRUT (R)— Human rights watchdog Amnesty International has urged the Syrian government to free an ailing Palestinian political activist who has been in jail since 1966.

"Amnesty International is concerned at the serious deterioration in the health of long-term detainee Abd Al Majid Zaghmout, and urges the Syrian government to immediately release him," the group said in a statement issued on Thursday.

"The prisoner was recently diagnosed with cancer and needs urgent and specialist treatment," the statement added.

There was no immediate comment from the Syrian authorities.

Amnesty said the 54-year-old Zaghmout, arrested in

does not permit Israeli citizens to use the airport, citing security concerns.

An Israeli charter flight from Ben Gurion International Airport to Gaza International was cancelled Thursday after the defence ministry imposed restrictions on who could fly.

The flight was to have carried Israeli legislators, peace activists and dozens of journalists who were to have been greeted at the Gaza airport by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

The legislators spoke on their cellular phones to Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai to try to persuade him to rescind his decision.

The government offered to let the lawmakers fly, but with only 10 journalists, one-fourth

the number signed up for the flight, and without the 30 peace activists who organised the trip.

The 13 lawmakers, representing both opposition and coalition parties, argued heatedly before deciding not to go.

Arafat's security chief in the Gaza Strip, Mohammad Dahlan, who had been waiting for the visitors at Gaza International, was disappointed.

"The aim of this plane trip to Gaza today was to support peace, to build strong confidence between the two peoples and to give more support to the peace process," Dahlan said.

"It looks to us that this government doesn't want this to be."

The invitation was originally made at the end of talks between Syrian and Iraqi water experts in the Iraqi capital in September.

Officials said the Baghdad meeting expressed concern at Turkey's construction of a series of dams on these rivers without consulting downstream countries Syria and Iraq.

CAIRO (R) — Egypt's arrest of human rights activist Hafez Abu Seda drew more protests on Friday from international human rights groups around the world.

London-based Amnesty International and New York-based Human Rights Watch were among the latest organizations to add their voices to a chorus of dismay over Abu

Free activist

1966, was the longest serving political prisoner in Syria. He is a member of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction.

The group said Zaghmout was sentenced to death by a military court on charges of killing a Palestinian guerrilla leader but has remained in jail despite a 1989 ruling by Syria's defence ministry to release him.

Human Rights Watch said in a statement received on Friday that it had written to President Hosni Mubarak over what its executive director says for the Middle East and North Africa, Hanny Megally, described as a shocking development.

"The government should be investigating and prosecuting torturers in the police and security forces, not sending human rights activists to prison," Megally said.

Abu Seda was detained on Tuesday.

Santa Claus effigies appear to be climbing the outside of an office building in downtown Stuttgart on Friday. The mannequins were hung as part of the upcoming festive season (AP photo)

(Continued from page 1)

Ritter said UNSCOM sought information from Israeli, U.S. and British intelligence agencies as part of efforts to unravel what he called an elaborate Iraqi "concealment mechanism."

Aziz asked Annan to "place controls to prevent repetition of such practices and protect the information which is taken from Iraq and that their use should be granted by you or the Security Council."

He also repeated an earlier request that Annan revise the composition of UNSCOM, which he said was mostly comprised of "officers from American and British intelligence and... armies."

"The presence of these [people] in the commission, in light of the continued American and British threat

ration for a comprehensive U.N. review of Iraq's progress in dismantling its weapons of mass destruction.

Russia, France and China have made clear that they would like to see the Security Council review acknowledge Iraqi efforts so that trade sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait can be eased or lifted.

But the United States and Britain, the other two veto-holding Security Council members, have said they still see the lifting of sanctions as some way off.

The foreign ministry said Aziz's talks would also cover Russian participation in the U.N.-supervised oil-for-food programme, under which Iraq is allowed to export some oil and use the proceeds to import food and medicines.

(Continued from page 1)

The Palestinian cabinet and the PLO Executive Committee were later Friday to discuss procedures for convening the Palestinian National Council (PNC), the Palestinians' parliament-in-exile, on Dec. 14.

On that day, the PNC and the other groups are to "reaffirm" a letter to President Clinton in which Arafat declares that clauses of the PLO founding charter calling for Israel's destruction are null and void.

A Palestinian university student who participated in that attack and seized the soldier's M-16 assault rifle has been arrested, a senior *Palestinian* official said today.

Albright spoke with Netanyahu by phone Thursday to discuss the latest crisis, which came a week before Clinton's arrival Dec. 12 to oversee the second phase of the peace accord.

State Department spokesman James Rubin had criticised the Israeli suspension and called for implementation of the Wye River accord as signed.

After the cabinet move, the hard-line National Religious Party announced it would withdraw its support for a bill to dissolve the parliament and call new elections.

David Bar Ilan, Netanyahu's

leader, told *Albright* that Israel's conditions for renewing the handover of West Bank territory to the Palestinians were not new.

Netanyahu says he will only be satisfied by a public declaration by Arafat that the Palestinians are dropping plans to declare statehood in May and that they accept Israel's criteria for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

Those prisoners plan to begin a hunger strike Saturday to press their demands for freedom.

Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon was to leave this weekend for meetings in Washington with Albright and senior Clinton administration officials.

In other developments Friday, Palestinians briefly clashed with Jewish settlers and Israeli troops in two land protests.

In one incident near the Jewish settlement of Ateret, about 50 Palestinians from the village of Umm Safa blocked an access road with rocks and a washing machine to protest the expropriation of village land. Palestinians stoned a settler bus, but no one was hurt.

Near the West Bank village of Turmus Ayya, some 100 Palestinians held Muslim prayers on land slated for con-

fication by Israel. Four Jewish settlers fired in the air, and the Palestinians gradually dispersed.

A preliminary Israeli army investigation into Wednesday's incident near Ramallah has found that the soldier under attack, Cpl. Assaf Meyera, 19, should have fired on his assailants, the Yediot Ahronot daily said.

However, the army spokesman's office said that although Meyera did violate army procedure by carrying a weapon that was unloaded, the investigation was still ongoing as to whether he should have loaded it and opened fire.

Meyera's mother has been taken aback by the surge of public criticism of her son for not using his gun.

"It basically makes me feel that they prefer having him open fire and end up dead—a dead hero," Lisa Meyera told Associated Press Television News.

In Gaza Thursday, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat called the three Israeli cabinet demands "an attempt to avoid honest and accurate implementation of what was agreed upon."

"I wouldn't have been surprised if the fourth condition would have been for us to sing the Israeli national anthem," Tibi remarked.

BUCHAREST (AP) — When a young Romanian man was jilted days before his wedding, his family decided to rent a bride. If the wedding had been cancelled, the family would have lost the hundreds of dollars it had spent. For days, the "bride," a childhood friend named Mariana, rehearsed lines and practiced the ceremony with the groom for a promised \$100 fee. But only two-thirds of the guests came, and some, surprised by the new bride, weren't as generous as expected and consequently, Mariana received only \$3. Now Lucian has fallen for her and wants the marriage to last.

DUBAI (R) — A five-year old Bangladeshi boy, allegedly kidnapped and brought to the United Arab Emirates to work as a camel jockey, is to be repatriated after he fell from a camel and broke a leg, a newspaper reported on Friday. A Bangladeshi man, who is alleged to have brought the boy to the UAE as his son with a false passport has been arrested by police in the Gulf Arab state. Boys between five and 10 years old are recruited as camel jockeys in the UAE. Camel racing is big business in the UAE, with cars and thousands of dollars as prizes for the winners.

LONDON (R) — The 5,300-year-old corpse found perfectly preserved in a Tyrolean glacier seven years ago, probably used natural laxatives and antibiotics. Experts have discovered he had intestinal worms which could have caused diarrhoea and stomach pain. Two walnut-sized objects tied to a leather thong that were found with his body were the fruit of *Piptoporus betulinus*, a fungus that has antibiotic properties. "The discovery of the fungus suggests that the Ice Man was aware of his intestinal parasites and fought them with measured doses of *Piptoporus betulinus*," said Capasso. Professor Luigi Capasso, an anthropologist at the National Archaeological Museum in Chieti, Italy.

BUDAPEST (R)—An 11-year-old Hungarian girl gave birth to a healthy baby girl Friday morning, becoming the country's youngest modist.

Hungarian news agency MTI said. The father of the new-born is 17, while the maternal grandfather is 32 years old and the grandmother is 31, it said. MTI added that police were investigating in the case, as Hungary's criminal code considers sex with minors of less than 12 years as a violent criminal offence.

Houston junks
error-hidden guide

city programmes and available education facilities was so riddled with spelling and grammatical errors it had to be thrown out, city officials said Thursday. Words misspelled in the 14-page brochure for the Texas city included "library," "teachers" and "national." An aide to Houston Mayor Lee Brown said that of the 2,500 copies printed, only a small number had been distributed before the shooting spelling was spotted.

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